

DOUBLE ISSUE

THE HISTORY WARS

Memory, race and the fight for justice

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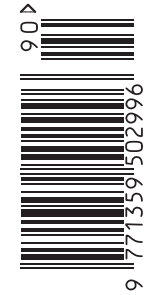
The world's top

50

thinkers for the
Covid-19 age

Plus Sarah Churchwell • Will Self • Miranda France
Jonathan Powell • Michael Heseltine • Ann Pettifor
Paul Collier • Joyce Carol Oates

And Sameer Rahim: I was Saddam's prisoner



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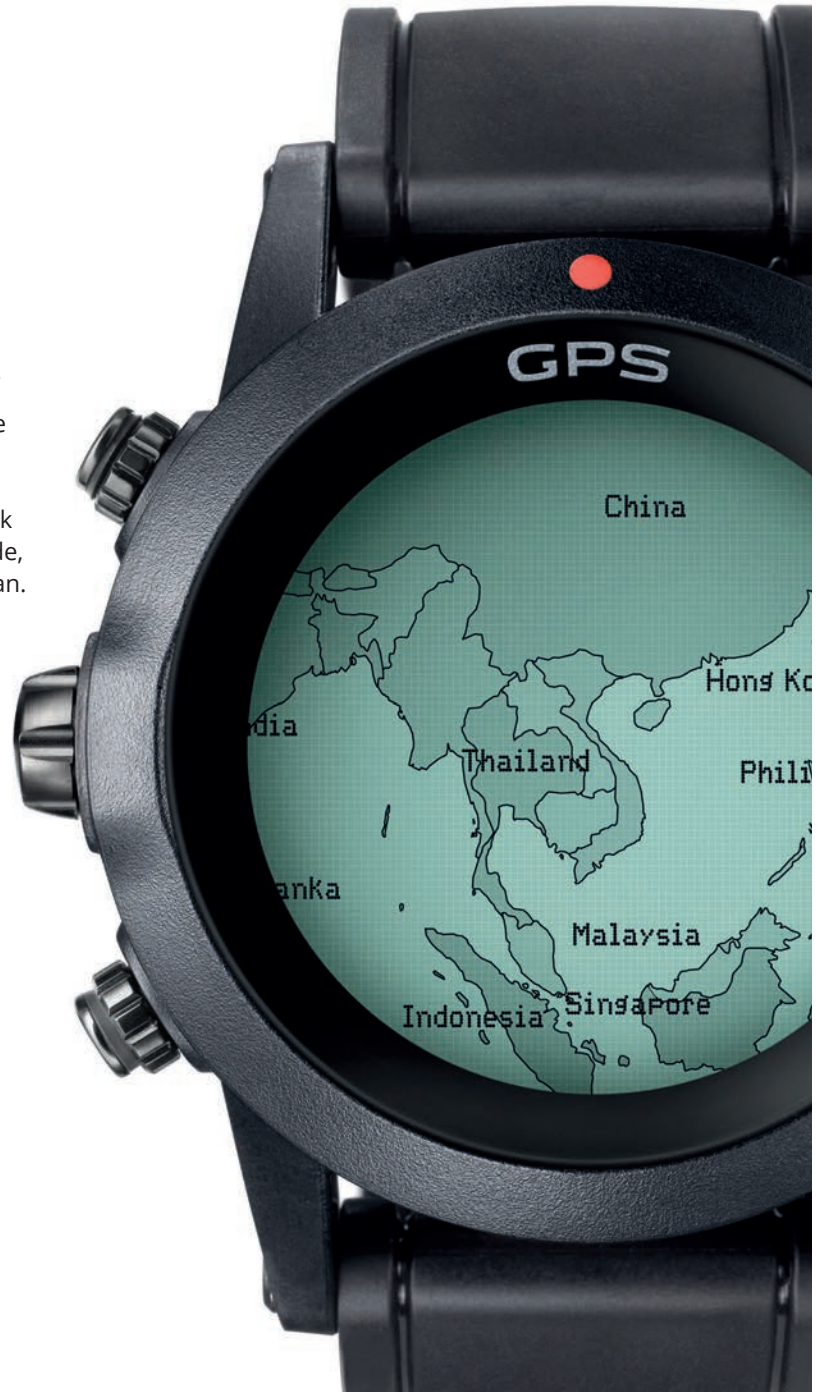
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Editorial



Taking stock

Tom Clark

Downing tools for the summer usually provides a rare chance to stop, take stock and—if need be—rethink. Ordinarily it's a brief but precious window, unmatched at any other time except, perhaps, new year. How different things are in 2020. The summer “break” for many of us will involve staying in the same home where we have, in effect, been “paused” since the first stirrings of spring.

In many respects—financial, medical, social—we will be counting the cost for a long time. But like any really big disruption, the effects are not uniform: there will be silver linings to the deadly Covid-19 cloud. Some are immediately obvious, like rediscovering the forgotten joys of our immediate neighbourhood (Jonathan Nunn, p117) and the possibility, at least, of kicking our climate-endangering aviation addiction (Barbara Speed, p58).

“Locked-down minds seem to be given to settling on new priorities—and wrestling with old demons”

But those long months with more than the usual time to read and think have, it turns out, also proved to be important ones for the life of the mind. In this Summer Special double issue, *Prospect* identifies the world's 50 leading writers, scientists and thinkers for these strange times and, as I explain in introducing the choices (p22), it is a completely new set—with not a single holdover from last year. The emergency has put a new premium on more practical minds and ideas, and the variety is something to marvel at. You can vote to crown the top thinker of all, as well as telling us who you think we missed. We'll report back in the next issue.

As well as settling on new priorities, locked-down minds would seem to be given to wrestling with old demons. Having flared up as a straightforward response to US police brutality, the Black Lives Matter movement spread with striking rapidity across the Atlantic (Colin Grant, p12), and soon morphed into a disruptive discussion about the stories that both Britain and the United States tell themselves about their pasts. Sarah Churchwell opens our trio of essays on “the history wars” on p34, by taking us back from the statues being toppled in Washington, Bristol and London this summer, and into the origins of the myth of “Anglo-Saxon” supremacy. This might surprise you, but an awful lot of the trouble turns out to

be down to Sir Walter Scott—when you read her piece, you'll find a meticulous case for his prosecution.

Fiery debates about “who we are” as a country can easily lapse into a shouting match between rival tribes. Kenan Malik (p40) despairs of the turn to identity politics, which he believes is—in under-appreciated ways—warping the thinking of the right as much as the left. To transcend the sectarian divisions, and distil truly shared wisdom from the dark chapters of the past, societies must find a way to atone. Ivan Krastev and Leonard Benardo cast their eyes round the world at different attempts to achieve at first truth and then reconciliation, before homing in on the unhappy case of post-Stalinist Russia and the happier one of post-Nazi Germany. Their conclusion? Just as each country commits its own atrocities, so each must find its own distinctive way to weave the ugly facts into its national story. There is, in other words, no universal way to call a satisfactory truce in a history war.

Elsewhere in this double issue, the most packed that *Prospect* has ever produced, we explore a neglected social problem: the fading right to have daylight in urban homes (Jessica Brown, p70); reacquaint ourselves with a half-forgotten historical statesman (Chris Mullin on Ernest Bevin, p76); and find room for arresting new fiction (Gabriel Krauze on p104, plus a trio of extended fiction reviews starting on p97). While day-to-day life may have stopped recently, the political jostling never does—and it can never be safely ignored. So we also provide authoritative briefings on the manoeuvrings in London (Jonathan Powell, Michael Heseltine and David King, p14-15) and Washington—courtesy of Sam Tanenhaus's chilling portrait, on p80, of Bill Barr, the US attorney general, who seems willing to do *anything* to win Trump a second term.

Acrimony and fear abound; politics is brutal and the basic rules of the game are increasingly contested. But the great minds saluted in this issue, as well as the rich writing, are a reminder of the human imagination and human intelligence which will, we must hope, eventually usher in a brighter tomorrow.

Tom Clark

🐦 @prospect_clark

Angus Deaton, Clive James, Martin
Rees, **Isolation** Barbara Speed, David
Place-Wells, Daniel Markovits, Ray Mo
ya Goodfellow, Martha Spurrier, Sus
yman, Lisa Appignanesi, Clare Malon
er Foster, Dan Hancox, Jennie Brist
f Shafak, Alan Rusbridger, Paul Mas
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em, DJ Taylor, Mike Berners-Lee, Ca
ntzenbrink, Lionel Shriver, Hephzib

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August/September 2020

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Prospect salutes a range of indispensable minds for a planet in trauma

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Prospect Interview

Coming up on the podcast:

Prospect editors on 2020's top thinkers
Andrew Adonis on Ernest Bevin
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Peter Kellner on how long before Leicester's Covid-19 flare-up, his Victorian ancestors were trying to limit the spread of infectious diseases in the city

Michael Coveney on how the theatre industry will have to adjust to survive

Vince Cable on why the Lib Dems should not move to the left

Maya Gordon on how the plague outbreaks during the 16th and 17th centuries showed a class divide

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The politics of atonement **p46**

Jessica Brown is a journalist and writer. Her work can be found at
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Daylight robbery **p70**

Sarah Churchwell is professor of American literature and public
 understanding of the humanities at the University of London. She is the
 author of "Behold, America: A History of America First and the American
 Dream" (Bloomsbury)

White lies matter **p34**

Paul Collier's latest book with John Kay, "Greed is Dead: Politics after
 Individualism" (Allen Lane) is out now

Getting somewhere **p50**

Anthony Cummins is a critic and translator

State of (half) the nation **p99**

Ivan Krastev is the co-author with Stephen Holmes of "The Light that
 Failed: A Reckoning" (Allen Lane)

The politics of atonement **p46**

Sam Leith is literary editor of the Spectator

American pantheon **p92**

Kenan Malik is a writer, broadcaster and Observer columnist. His latest
 books are "From Fatwa to Jihad" (Atlantic) and "The Quest for a Moral
 Compass: A Global History of Ethics" (Atlantic)

In place of hope **p40**

Benjamin Markovits's latest novel is "Christmas in Austin" (Faber)

Family matters **p97**

Chris Mullin is a former Labour minister. His latest novel, "The Friends of
 Harry Perkins" (Scribner) was recently published in paperback

Titan of the west **p76**

Ann Pettifor is a political economist. Her latest book is "The Case for the
 Green New Deal" (Verso)

Should we aim to get the economy back to "business as usual"? **p20**

Sameer Rahim is Prospect's Managing Editor. His novel "Asghar and
 Zahra" (JM Originals) was longlisted for the Desmond Elliott Prize. He is a
 judge for this year's Booker Prize

I was Saddam's prisoner **p64**

Will Self's most recent book is the memoir "Will." He holds the chair in
 contemporary thought at Brunel University

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Sam Tanenhaus is Prospect's US Writer-at-Large

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 director of English PEN

Deaths by morning **p102**

Paul Wallace is the former European economics editor of the Economist.
 He is the author of "The Euro Experiment" (CUP)

Should we aim to get the economy back to "business as usual"? **p20**

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Letters



Democracy's salvation

America is in terminal decline; China is on the rise; the EU is too supine. What about “we, the people”? Are we colluding with the disintegration of liberal democracy by acquiescing to the “acceptable authoritarianism” of the lockdown, as Steve Bloomfield suggests? (“The new battle for democracy,” July.)

I share his concerns about liberal democracy but not his implied fatalism. “Liberal” and “democracy” are not synonymous, as Bloomfield acknowledges,

but neither was their alliance an “accident.” European democrats devised rights charters to limit the powers of elected leaders because they understood that majority rule cannot ensure against tyranny. When legislating for liberty proved insufficient after the devastation of the Depression and Second World War, the UN drafted new universal human rights principles to underpin democracies, including basic economic and social rights. The failure of democratic governments to deliver such basic economic security and well-being for their populations after the 2008 crash was the decisive driver in decoupling democracy from liberal norms.

So democracy's decay long preceded the Covid-19 crisis. Elected despots trampling on citizens' rights are a feature of our age. But the Covid-19 crisis provides an opportunity to draw on a revived spirit of co-operation, collectivism and compassion to “build back better” and realign democracy with the values of dignity, equality and humanity. Liberty on its own will not suffice!

Francesca Klug, London School of Economics

Containing catastrophe

Peter Frankopan's article (“The next pandemic,” July) reminds us that few things in life carry zero risk. And some activities, such as research carried out into infectious disease in bio-containment laboratories, are essential, as we see today with Covid-19, to manage greater risks to society from natural (or deliberate) outbreaks of viral disease.

But even a very low likelihood of accidental release of a lethal pathogen, given its grave potential effect, creates a significant danger. This is an area where the precautionary principle has to be scrupulously enforced. However high the cost of security and containment measures, it has to be afforded.

It is always worth remembering, however, the well-known equation governing overall expected risk. That risk in this field is the product of four factors: the likelihood of accidental or malicious release; the vulnerability of different sectors

of society to infection; the likely effectiveness of healthcare provision (and the detect, track, trace and treat system) in managing the initial impact; and then the duration of the impact on normal life, which should be reduced by the long-term building of national resilience.

Sensible investment in each factor, wherever possible, provides a layered defence so that any individual system failures do not produce catastrophe. Even if we cannot expect precise forewarning of individual outbreaks, we do have strategic warning of the general risk that we must use, so we are less surprised by surprise when it happens.

David Omand was UK security and intelligence co-ordinator. His book “How Spies Think” is published later in the year

House-bound politics

James Graham makes a convincing argument for the importance of physical proximity in politics

(“A motion to regret virtual parliaments,” June). But the government has compelled MPs to return to Westminster prematurely. The fear of reactionaries—that MPs might get *too* used to a smooth and efficient system for online voting—has led to the precipitate abolition of one of the most effective hybrid virtual/in-person legislatures in the world.

In place of a temporary arrangement ensuring that MPs participating online or in the Commons chamber were able to represent their constituents with absolute parity, we now have a system which privileges those who turn up in person over those who are unable to travel to Westminster. While peers in the House of Lords have adapted to online proceedings effortlessly, MPs queueing up to vote around the Palace of Westminster have been subject to ridicule at home and abroad.

The hasty return to the old ways represents an ill-thought-through and troubling assertion of government control over parliament.

Hannah White, Deputy Director, Institute for Government

Going global

In “A patchwork planet” (June), Dani Rodrik asks us to imagine a new form of globalisation focused on uncontestedly global public goods, such as public health or climate. He argues in favour of a “well-crafted” multilateralism that fosters cooperation with few losers, while avoiding distributional consequences within or between countries.

While few would argue against “globalisers” harvesting any remaining “win-win” opportunities, limiting international coordination purely to these efforts would hamstring our ability to tackle sprawling problems—including public health and climate change themselves. Indeed, Rodrik's favourite example of high-yield global coordination, temporary labour migration from poor to rich nations, has been stymied precisely because of its “within and between” distri-

butional consequences. Effective policy responses to pressing global challenges will create winners and losers. The hard job is not imagining a better globalisation—it's charting a fair and democratic pathway that gets us there.

Mary E Lovely, Syracuse University/Peterson Institute

A historic fall

The fundamental changes brought about in our legal structures by the 2005 Constitutional Reform Act, a subject of recent discussion in *Prospect*, also included, most unfortunately as I believe, the dismemberment of the historic office of lord chancellor, stripping him of his role as head of and appointer of the judiciary, and of his speakership of the House of Lords.

This much diminished figure is now but a shadow of lord chancellors past. The holder of the office used to be of the greatest moment and wield great influence: an authoritative figure at the zenith of his political career and with no axe left to grind; the very conscience of government, there to safeguard the values of the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary.

Nowadays, the lord chancellor, doubling up as justice secretary, inappropriately responsible for both the administration of criminal justice and the prison estate, is a career politician, often comparatively junior and with continuing ambitions, and sometimes with no legal background whatsoever. And, as amply demonstrated by the “Enemies of the People” case (surely too well known to require exposition here), this politician is on occasion careless of the lord chancellor's express statutory responsibility for defending the rule of law.

In the last 10 years no fewer than six different ministers have held this much depleted office, not all with conspicuous success; that is some indication of the low esteem in which it is now held and not conducive to its most effective discharge.

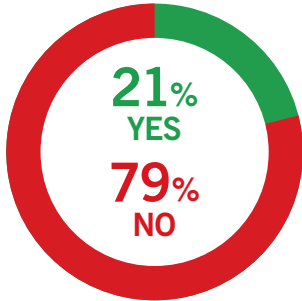
Simon Brown, former Supreme Court justice and author of “Playing off the Roof” (Marble Hill, £15)



The Duel

Last month *Bruno Mações* and *Anu Bradford* debated whether Covid-19 would kill off the EU.

Readers said:



This month *Paul Wallace* and *Ann Pettifor* debate whether we should plot a return to economic “business as usual.” See **p20**

WHOdunnit?

The WHO will only ever be as good as its member states allow it to be, and funding is only one aspect (“Who is the WHO?” June).

Member states elect the director general and regional directors, and through the World Health Assembly and regional committees, direct how it works. The WHO cannot enter a member state without an invitation, or intervene—even in the case of an epidemic that might have transboundary implications—because that is the constraint member states have imposed.

The UK did not immediately (or perhaps at all) involve the regional office of the WHO in the BSE epidemic in the mid-1990s, which the WHO said “increased the profile of transmissible spongiform encephalopathies as a risk to human health and has already affected public health policy worldwide.”

The Johnsons and Trumps of this world have expert advisers at their disposal if they choose to use them, so if they did not sound the national alarm when the WHO sounded it internationally, then they have only themselves to blame. *Keith Baverstock was a regional adviser to the WHO*

Firm foundations

We have known since at least the financial crisis (remember that?) that the economy needs to be re-

balanced, if not reset. And the Covid-19 emergency provides us with another opportunity to do that. As *Barry Eichengreen* says (“Schumpeter’s virus,” July) economic progress involves a dynamic process of change and re-orientation, built on principles to ensure equity.

Many jobs today simply did not exist 30 years ago, and the nature of work has changed radically. The big driver of that change is the process of creation and destruction of firms. Around 9-12 per cent of firms die every year and there was an annual “birth rate” of around 12-14 per cent prior to lockdown.

That creation is sharply down now, by roughly a quarter—very much in line with the overall contraction in GDP. But business creation will be the motor of eventual recovery. And so, to find the right policies, we first need to ask: what funding, infrastructure, public goods and types of workers will those new firms need to limit the sustained hit to our prosperity?

Jagjit Chadha, director, NIESR

When rules run away

A rule that decrees that, all other things being equal, it is more important to save the lives of younger people would reset the moral thermostat of society (“The Duel,” June). We do not know what would follow from that, but it is unlikely to be good.

Ethical and legal rules, once promulgated, do not stay in the context in which they were forged. They metastasise widely, and can affect the whole ethos of a society—determining the way that decisions are made in arenas a million conceptual miles from the original context. It may be possible to police and audit the way that the promulgated rules work; it is much harder to control the evolution and use of the new norms that, often slowly and unconsciously, emerge from the new zeitgeist.

Charles Foster, Oxford

As a liberal Christian and retired hospital chaplain of 25 years’ experience, who has been at the coal face of trying to help relatives make decisions, I can relate well to both perspectives on a most pertinent ethical dilemma.

I feel that there is the need for some general principles that guide doctors’ actions and I vote “yes” to saving younger lives.

From my experience I find this to be what has happened over the

years, in times of crisis. Of course in an ideal world, where there were unlimited financial resources, there would be no need even to discuss this issue, as every patient would be given appropriate care. But that is not our world today.

Clifford Chonka, Newport

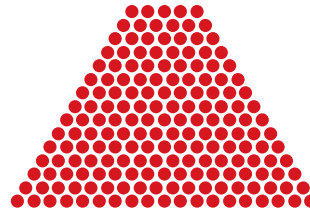
Nothing escapes Austen

Lee Child has never read Jane Austen? (“Brief Encounter,” July.) I’d not have thought that a necessary requisite considering his genre. But he is nearer Austen than he thinks.

His maxim that “the only way to learn to write is to read for 40 years and the only way a text can have a beating heart is for it to be the organic work of one mind” must surely apply to the lady who started writing at the age of 11, cutting her teeth on the 500-odd books in her father’s library but who, sadly, only managed six major novels in her short life of 42 years.

Many a person still looks to them for escapism, either for love, wit, wisdom or social comment. There may be no overt kidnapping, killing, danger or rescue missions, but try finding them in more subtle terms in the social environment in Austen.

Maureen Stiller, honorary secretary, Jane Austen Society



Your number's up

A small complaint about “Age-old truths” (July). The figures given report on the chances of death with Covid-19 at different ages. But your small print reveals that the data only relates to deaths in hospital. These are by definition only one kind of case. What is surely essential is to look at all cases—including those not hospitalised—in assessing and describing the overall relative risks.

David Miller, physiologist, University of Glasgow

Letters should be sent by email to letters@prospect-magazine.co.uk Please include your full name and address. Letters may be edited

In fact

Of the 10,650,000 enslaved Africans who survived the Atlantic crossing, only 388,000—or 3.6 per cent—landed in the US. More Africans were brought to Barbados (435,000); 4.8m went to Brazil. *Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture*

At any time, all of us are infected with between eight and 12 viruses without showing any symptoms. *Guardian, 30th May 2020*

Thomas More is the only MP to have been made a saint, and the patron saint of politicians. *@AmIRightSir, 22nd June 2020*

Out of 157 currencies in circulation, there are 315 banknotes featuring animals; the most common type of animal is the bird, on 78 notes, and the most popular bird is the eagle, on 41. *Money.co.uk, 4th May 2020*

On 31st May 2020, the last American with a Civil War pension died; Irene Triplett received \$877.56 a year due to her veteran father Mose Triplett, who was 83 when she was born in 1930. *Washington Post, 4th June 2020*

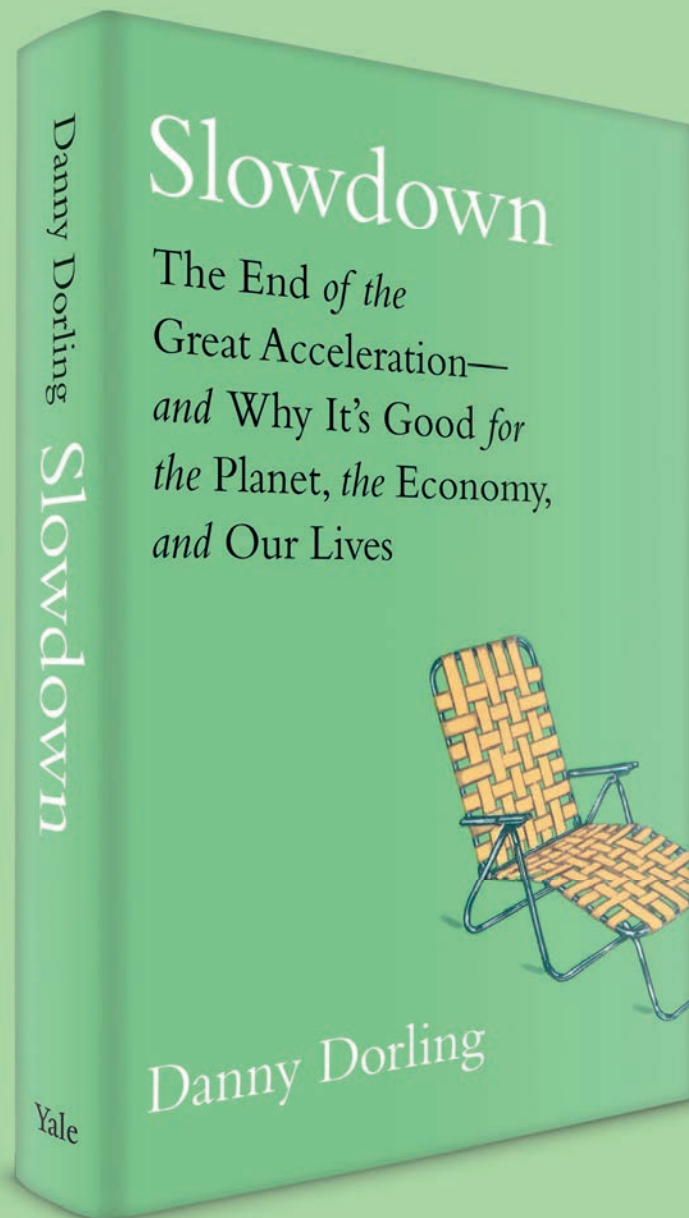
Since the Bundesliga resumed in May, the number of home victories has slipped by 10 percentage points, to 33 per cent of matches played in empty stadiums, down from 43 per cent played to crowds. *New York Times, 1st July 2020*

With a market capitalisation of \$205bn, Tesla has overtaken Toyota to become the world’s most valuable carmaker—despite only producing 0.5m vehicles a year to the Japanese firm’s 10m plus. *Financial Times, 1st July 2020*

Jane Austen coined the words “outsider” and “irrepressible”; Charlotte Brontë gave us “spring-clean” and, perhaps, “self-doubt.” *BBC.com, 7th May 2020*



Despite what you *might* think, human progress
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Opinions



Call time on “cancel culture”—and hold on to your friends

Miranda France

How different are your friends? If you had to assemble a kind of sports team of difference, who would be in it? I’m not talking about racial or sexual diversity here—although let’s make those differences our base. More specifically, do you know any monks or fund managers? Anyone who works in TV or in a factory? Does anyone you know go hunting? Do you know any hunt saboteurs?

My own friends include lawyers and bankers—hard to avoid in south-west London—but also communists and anarchists, from my time living in Spain and Latin America. I know scientists who demand evidence for every theory, but I also know a shaman who can recover lost fragments of your soul from the universe. Some of my friends own two houses; some rent rooms. One lives on a boat.

This seems important, because these are tribal times. Any hesitancy to celebrate the demolition of statues, or the faintest association with JK Rowling is enough to provoke not mere disagreement, but something more like excommunication—or in the new parlance “cancellation.” There’s a hankering for purity that rules out conversation, let alone friendship, with people who think differently.

And yet I have a friend who thinks crystals will heal you, and a friend who’d like to bring back corporal punishment. I know a wine merchant who sometimes calls women “girls” and a designer who thinks it’s more inclusive to call them “womxn.” Both terms infuriate me, but we still hang out. Recently an old friend talked me through her previous lives. I don’t believe in reincarnation, but I wasn’t offended—just a bit bored.

Probably the only thing all these people have in common is that they’re good company—otherwise they wouldn’t be friends. Not all of them are close, of course, and some of them I barely see from one year to the next. They’ve been gathered over many years, in childhood, at university, in workplaces, at the school gate. There’s nothing like having children at a large inner-city school to infuse your middle age with the lifeblood of new friendships.



Philip Hensher has defended the right to disapprove of his same-sex marriage

It was at the school gate that I acquired a Catholic friend who opposes abortion and a Ghanaian friend who thinks homosexuality is a sin. Gay sex is illegal in Ghana, so hers isn’t an unusual view. How, you may ask, can I sit down at the same table with these women? The simple answer is that it would be much worse not to sit down with them. A curated friendship list in which every member holds an approved set of views is not only stifling, it leaves you unable to understand people who don’t share them. Our convictions may be dearly held, but they can race towards paranoia and hatred if they don’t regularly come up against thoughtful opposition. One of the worst aspects of Brexit has been sitting in rooms with people who all think the same thing and keep shouting it louder, like a monolingual tourist on holiday. Where there’s a conversation, there’s a chance for progress. We moulder each other’s ideas. Isn’t that the basis of a civilised society?

The writer Philip Hensher recently tweeted a video of his 2014 appearance on *Newsnight*, in which he charmingly defended journalist Melanie McDonagh’s right to disapprove of his marriage to another man; you could see her start to question her belief on the spot. Hensher doubted that such equanimity would be permissible in 2020s Britain.

I myself wasn’t sure where I stood on same-sex marriage when it was first proposed in 2011. I’m a vicar’s daughter, but my doubts owed more to pedantry than faith. It seemed to me that marriage had been instituted for men and women and that it was no better, and probably rather worse, an arrangement than civil partnerships (some gay people also thought this). Those doubts were dispelled because I knew several gay couples and saw how much the amendment meant to them. I now feel churlish for ever doubting its value. Friends changed my mind in a way that being attacked on Twitter wouldn’t have done. The virtual noise doesn’t enlighten anyone. It just makes you feel frightened and depressed.

Taking offence is nothing new, but the speed at which an outraged army can now be marshalled to support the offended person forces any dissenters to muster their own troops. We’re driven to pick sides, when perhaps the middle ground would have suited most of us best. I’m not always perfectly sure what my views are—isn’t that a good thing? For instance, I’m largely opposed to voluntary euthanasia or legalising cannabis—but we can talk about it. I’m prepared to change my mind.

Have I strenuously tried to change the mind of my pro-life friend, then, or my anti-gay one? No: a friendship is not a conversion project. People’s convictions reflect their culture, religion and upbringing and need to be handled with sensitivity. The fact that we are in each other’s lives is a start. Other kinds of conversation may—who knows—sway particular views down the road. My friends probably hope to sway my ideas, too. It’s a friendly battle. A soft diplomacy which—not to sound too lofty about it—creates the fabric of a progressive democracy, where cultural institutions are about free thought, not orthodoxies.

Lines do have to be drawn somewhere. If my friends began actively campaigning against gay rights, or women’s reproductive rights, our friendship would end. All the same, I hope that I would still see them and keep talking. I don’t want all my conversations to be with people who think like me.

Miranda France is a novelist and translator



A common cause, an ocean apart

Colin Grant

Black Lives Matter protesters in Britain have shown themselves to be a rainbow coalition. It is, though, surprising to me how many of them have been black. Despite a tradition of white activists casting black people as radical agents of change, historically speaking black Britons, at least the Windrush generation and their children, have been notably cautious about joining such protests.

Black Caribbeans who came to Britain were the inheritors of a strategy of resistance to authority dating back to slavery, characterised as “playing fool to catch wise”—cunningly disabusing those with more power of the notion that you constituted a threat to them. That stance very gradually evolved into the recognition that if they protested, they would be in greater jeopardy than their white allies; black protesters were likely to be treated more severely by the courts and marked as troublemakers by future employers.

“There were streets I couldn’t go down [in Bristol] because I was black,” recalls Paul Stephenson of the turbulent 1960s. “I was arrested and thrown in jail for refusing to leave a public house. We couldn’t work on buses. Couldn’t be a policeman. Couldn’t be a fireman.” At the same time, 4,000 miles away across the Atlantic, black Americans led by Martin Luther King and others were putting their bodies on the line in their fight for freedom. When black people were refused jobs as bus conductors and drivers in Bristol, Stephenson felt something had to be done. Emulating the Montgomery bus boycott, he went on to organise a successful boycott of the Bristol Omnibus Company in 1963.

From as early as I can remember, as the child of Jamaican migrants to the UK, there was a kind of raw glamour attached to African American lives. We might have been “under heavy manners,” oppressed by the police and state, but our own privations seemed attenuated versions of those endured by African Americans. We looked on with horror in the 1960s and 1970s at news footage—of defenceless black marchers being spat on, bitten by snarling Alsatians and pummelled by water cannons; of sombre mourners of assassinated civil rights leaders; and then American cities on fire. All were terrifying and pitiable. Though the stoical pacifism of King’s followers was ennobling, to



Power of protest: Stokely Carmichael, left, arrives in London in 1967

most of my black British peers the unflinching defiance of the Black Panther Party was more attractive.

Stokely Carmichael, founder of the Black Power movement, wowed audiences when he came to London in 1967 with his scorching denunciations of American apartheid. Angela Davis recalls his words “cutting like a switchblade,” leaving her buoyed by their “cathartic power.” Carmichael also fired up the British Black Liberation Army. In 1975, three of its members armed themselves and, with the aim of securing funds for their movement, held up an Italian restaurant in Knightsbridge, in what became known as the “Spaghetti House Siege.” It lasted six days before the hostages were released unharmed.

My parents, along with their West Indian friends, were bemused and alarmed by their actions. Even though the siege ended peacefully, the activists were lampooned in the press. The writer Viv Adams (who came to the UK from Jamaica in 1962), says: “The British authorities played down the siege’s political dimensions, and attempted to portray it farcically as a robbery gone wrong.”

In the years leading up to the 1981 Brixton riots, the British establishment continued to pat itself on the back and cast the coun-

try’s race problem as an American import. The Windrush generation still considered the best way for them to change British society—and especially their children, who they discouraged from outward displays of protest—was not to tear down the master’s house but to get inside it. Looking to America, we were encouraged to learn the lesson not of the doomed Malcolm X’s “by any means necessary” but rather of Virgil Tibbs, the cool black detective played by Sidney Poitier, who uses his smarts to get the better of bigoted white Southerners in the Oscar-winning film *In the Heat of the Night*.

But no one relinquishes power until they have to. Until the noble artefacts of terror—whether they be statues of confederate army criminals or 17th-century Bristol slave merchants—are yanked from plinths and tossed into the river. As for Robert E Lee, so too for Edward Colston.

Here then is the convergence of our stories on the two sides of the Atlantic: the recognition that the African American fight is our fight. We in Britain intuitively understand that George Floyd could have been our brother, or Eric Garner, or the myriad others murdered in recent years. “The black man lives an existential nightmare in America,” says Viv Adams. “From the moment he leaves through his front door until he returns in the evening, incidents will come his way that are possibly dangerous and unpredictable, even if it doesn’t lead to extreme violence or death.”

But black people here, too, know that policeman’s knee; they have choked under it. (In the 10 years up to 2018-9, 13 black people have died in or following custody in England and Wales.) “And that awful image [of Floyd], speedily relayed through modern technologies, is a reminder of our own subjugation,” asserts Adams. “It leads to rage.”

The real lesson to be learned from this moment, whether in the UK or US, is there comes a time when the fire of indignation rages uncontrollably; when, in the words of the reggae musician Niney the Observer, there is “no more water to put out the fire.” In the future politicians, lamenting destruction of property more than destruction of the black body, will know that protesters offer a stark choice: let me breathe or let it burn.

Colin Grant is the author of five books including *“Homecoming: Voices of the Windrush Generation”*



A coup dressed up in statute

Schona Jolly

The new national security law that Beijing has imposed upon Hong Kong amounts to an alarming legal and ideological takeover. If the drafting is deliberately broad, China's aggressive ambition is wider still. The *stated* aim includes safeguarding the "sovereignty, unification and territorial integrity of the People's Republic of China," in which Hong Kong is formally a "special administrative region," run according to its own distinct rules since the British ceded sovereignty in 1997.

But despite claims that the only target of the new law is an "extremely small minority," within its sweeping remit, a very wide category of persons could be caught. Already, fear and self-censorship are reported among city residents. And as the handover anniversary was marked in July, the promise of autonomy through the "one country, two systems" arrangement was undermined.

It is over a year since mass, largely peaceful protests were triggered by plans to permit extradition to mainland China, which caused fear for fundamental liberties. It took months for Carrie Lam's Hong Kong administration to U-turn, but by then protesters considered it too late. While a minority, often the young, resorted to violence, police brutality was seen as widespread. Meanwhile, the scale and power of the pro-democracy movement clearly alarmed Beijing.

Such is the fear of what the new law implies that Britain has offered up to three million Hong Kong residents the opportunity to apply for citizenship. Other governments should be under no illusion as to what this law means: it could catch almost any act of dissent—and, thanks to sweeping provisions on extraterritoriality, theoretically anywhere in the world. Hong Kong's lawyers will need to draw their own red lines, but the scope and interpretation of the law ultimately lies in Beijing.

Today, not only is it a criminal offence in Hong Kong to shout or write slogans pertaining to freedom, but those who seek to resist by holding up blank placards, to avoid repeating the slogans themselves, will also be criminalised. Hong Kong's Education Bureau has reportedly told schools to remove any books breaching security law. Public libraries are said to be doing the same. There is good reason to fear that Hong Kong has



No consultation: Carrie Lam holds a copy of the new national security legislation

moved quickly towards a ban on all unwelcome political speech.

Many lawyers, activists and international organisations had warned that the new law threatened the freedoms underpinning the whole "one country, two systems" framework, and jeopardised supposedly protected basic rights—to free expression and peaceful protest, and against arbitrary or unlawful detention. Despite—or maybe because of—the concerns, the decision was made to publish the law just an hour before it came into force at midnight on 1st July, without previous discussion (still less consultation). This has left lawyers and journalists gravely concerned. The Hong Kong Bar Association professionally, but markedly, noted the failure to meaningfully consult, adding the "decanting of a mainland law affecting individual rights and obligations into the laws of Hong Kong without it passing through the Legislative Council is a constitutional novelty."

Woven into these provisions is what one might describe as conspiracy—the fear of foreign interference, and Beijing's convenient explanations that last year's protests reflected a foreign hand. An entire section on "colluding" with "external elements" includes a crime of "seriously disrupting the formulation and implementation of laws or policies" by the central or Hong Kong government, as well as engaging in undefined "hostile activities." It includes "provoking by

unlawful means hatred among Hong Kong residents towards the Central People's Government or the Government of the region."

All this seems squarely aimed at foreign "meddling," not only by states but NGOs and civil society. New structures are empowered to "take necessary measures to strengthen the management of and services for organs of foreign countries and international organisations." This threatens the free press and appears designed to isolate dissidents. Human rights are paid lip service, but the devil may lie in the *absence* of detail.

Fair trials are threatened. The warning not to make any statement or behave in a manner endangering national security could have a chilling effect on the independence of the judiciary. As so often, the banner of "national security" can be used to cover wide-ranging conduct. The confirmation that trials may—in murky-defined circumstances—take place on the mainland, or using mainland prosecutors or courts, provokes dark fears. So too do potentially secret trials, and barely-coded warnings aimed at defence lawyers within the text itself.

The Implementing Regulations published by Lam's craven government are a stark reflection of Beijing's intentions, including on digital surveillance. They grant alarmingly wide police powers: covering search, seizing and freezing of assets, and such sweeping authority over the flow of information online that the tech giants have suspended their co-operation with the Hong Kong authorities on data processing.

Canada has already chosen to suspend its extradition agreements with Hong Kong, and other western democracies may follow in their own national interests. Theoretically, even their citizens are at risk of extradition to mainland China for alleged offences. After fears of that extradition process triggered the protests last year, those threats have come full circle.

The dangerous haze of this law is an invitation to capricious rule. The consequences are as yet unclear, and lawyers will fight for the city's embedded rule of law and freedoms, but the terrain looks rough ahead. Tweeting #StandingWithHongKong in solidarity may now itself be a crime for any of us. Which is all the more reason to stand firm with its people.

Schona Jolly QC is Chair of the Bar Human Rights Committee of England and Wales

The governance of Britain



Reform—but not like this

Jonathan Powell

It is a truth universally acknowledged that a new prime minister in possession of a good majority must be in want of a conflict with the civil service. Harold Wilson was frustrated by the domination of Oxbridge amateurs, Tony Blair spoke of the “scars on his back” and David Cameron called the civil service “the enemies of enterprise.” Now the Boris Johnson-Dominic Cummings premiership has threatened the civil service with a “hard rain.”

A newly-elected PM is almost bound to view the permanent civil service as standing in their way, and it does indeed require reform. In our first few days at No 10 in 1997, a Home Office team came over to give a PowerPoint presentation with multicoloured graphs showing the crime rate would rise inexorably. Tony asked why, and the officials said because the growing economy put more temptations in the way of criminals. I asked what would happen if there was a recession. Without missing a beat, the officials replied that crime would rise because people would be deprived and more would resort to crime to survive.

Such fatalism is the first big problem with the service—it has the wrong mindset. Officials give ministers 100 reasons why their wizard new idea cannot be implemented, when what they want is a can-do attitude. The second big problem is with the skill set. It is still the case that kudos and rewards come from wrangling with legislation and high policy, not implementing policies on the ground. Civil servants are not as good as their French equivalents are at actually delivering *grand projets*, from the test-and-trace app to HS2.

One way to tackle this is to try to work round the civil service, and in May 1997 we made the classic mistake of transferring a successful election campaign team directly into No 10 to run a parallel operation to the government. It soon came a cropper. Cummings will learn the same lesson. He has gone much further, not only bringing the Vote Leave team into No 10, but also trying to run the whole government through a parallel network of special advisers in every department, all reporting to him. It has—already—failed spectacularly over coronavirus, and it will soon fail on the economy too.

The machinery of government is too complex to be run by a maverick and a band of mates with him as the hub, and everyone else a spoke.

Declaring war on the civil service is no way to go about reform. Coming soon after the departures of the permanent secretaries of both the home and foreign offices, ousting Mark Sedwill as Cabinet Secretary and National Security Adviser—and particularly replacing him in the latter role by chief Brexit negotiator David Frost—is the first step towards the American system of public service. Never having worked on security matters, Frost has no obvious qualifications to fill the job other than the fact that he is a Brexiteer.

There is a place for political appointments, but if you go the whole hog of filling jobs with fellow travellers, you throw out the advantages of an independent civil service and import myriad American problems: many of the 2,000 or so posts open to presidential appointment remain unfilled throughout the term; many candidates are unqualified; and every issue is hyper-politicised, right down to the guest list at State Department dinners.

Furthermore, by relying only on people who share your views, you compound the problem of “groupthink.” If everyone in senior positions thinks the same way, who is going to challenge and probe policies to avert serious mistakes?

The Johnson-Cummings approach is potentially the first part of a wider threat to our constitutional order. We have seen in Hungary and Poland what happens when populist right-wing governments feel frustrated at their inability to bring about change. First they gut the public services, then they move on to the public broadcaster and finally the judiciary. Our system is even more vulnerable: we have no written constitution; our checks and balances depend on unwritten conventions. The first of these checks is the civil service.

I don't know for sure that Johnson and Cummings intend to sweep away every independent institution in the country that stands in their way. But I don't want to stay silent and find out too late.

Jonathan Powell was Downing Street chief of staff from 1997 to 2007



Let go

Michael Heseltine

As a minister for 17 years—13 in the cabinet—it was my privilege to rely on civil servants. I then worked within or on the fringe of government as an adviser for another eight years. I could list a catalogue of decisions where I successfully encouraged civil servants in a direction they would not have devised. I can remember only two occasions when I felt I was facing deliberate resistance: in both cases I prevailed. I defend absolutely what some see as their hesitancy. It is a complete misunderstanding of the constitutional position to see the service in the role of innovator. That is the role of ministers.

“I can think of no time in my experience when the threat is so evident and the response so inadequate”

After months in which No 10 briefings have focused on the “blob” culture, a “Remainer” instinct and alleged incompetence, culminating in effective dismissal of the cabinet secretary, we were encouraged to await a definitive speech by Boris Johnson in Dudley on 30th June. If ever a speech were typical of Whitehall, this was it: parcels of public borrowing tied up in the ribbons of the sponsoring departments, designed by officials in London to cope with their perception of local problems.

In the early years of Margaret Thatcher's government, I walked the streets of riot-torn Liverpool and saw problems that demanded solutions. I understood all too clearly what was wrong. There was ineffective local leadership, the public and private sector were at each other's throats, and there was no local agency with the power to achieve results. The consequence perforce was that London made the decisions.

Forty years later we should have learnt. Above all, the existence of elected mayors in most of our great city conurbations has established a local power structure. (It is the closest we have in England to the devolved power in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and to the may-

As No 10 eyes up sweeping reforms to how the country is run, three senior figures who know Whitehall from the inside give their take



Heed the expert voice

David King

oral model adopted virtually everywhere in the advanced world). The structure of each of these conurbations is different, with strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats reflective of local circumstances. The mayoral structure establishes leadership that understands these individual characteristics and has the authority to draw in to partnership those with the relevant knowledge and skill. No structure in central government has the same unity.

In the PM's speech, there was no attempt to fulfil his manifesto commitment to "level up" mayoral powers, nor to give the private sector a meaningful role or embrace local hunger to "get devolution done." The first step needed is the appointment of a senior minister—probably Michael Gove—to coordinate Whitehall's spending power into a single pot. George Osborne did it, but after he left, the spending departments resisted and have now got "their money" back. Each mayor should fulfil his or her remit to submit their industrial strategy after careful coordination with academia and the public and private sectors, outlining how the available public money could best revitalise local economies. They should quantify the investment the private sector would add in support of the public investment. The quality of education and the relevance of training should, in the first instance, be locally determined. The available money should be subject to competitive bidding between authorities to drive up standards.

High on the list of my memories of the Second World War is a frequently asked question: "don't you know there is a war on?" Churchill never failed to remind us. He also mobilised every resource the nation possessed. The combined threats of Covid-19 and Brexit pose the most serious danger to our economy since then. How very different is the present response. The PM appears to be listening, above all, to one voice in the heart of Downing Street, endlessly carping about the civil service, the very people upon whom the government relies to implement its top-down policies. The elected mayors are marginalised or ignored. I can think of no time in my experience when the threat is so evident and the response so inadequate.

Michael Heseltine is a former deputy prime minister

The government chief scientific adviser is intended to create a bridge between the latest research developments to the government and civil service. Created by Churchill, it was deemed such a success that it has continued to the present day. But has it remained a success?

The post is traditionally filled by parachuting in a leading academic researcher. They must have the ability to communicate, plus an understanding of policy and a broad worldview. Even then, it is demanding. When offered the position in 2000, I wondered how I could possibly cover the range of scientific capability required. I am an expert in physical chemistry, but I quickly learned that my ability could be stretched to any field, provided I worked with experts to grasp the essential elements of their understanding.

The lesson of past crises like mad cow disease was that the CSA should be independent, and free to go out to the media and explain their advice to government. I took that principle very seriously, persuading Blair and Brown that it was in the government's interest. In this way, I managed the difficult balance between keeping the trust of the PM on the one hand and the public on the other.

When I started, polls were showing trust in science was low; over the following years, they displayed a rise. But we did face several crises. There was a fall in uptake of the MMR vaccine: immunity among children approached dangerous levels, with significant outbreaks of measles in particular. My baptism of fire came with foot-and-mouth. It was increasing exponentially, and being handled entirely by a team of civil servants from one department and their political boss. Aided by Sir John (now Lord) Krebs, I set up a team of epidemiologists, vets, modellers and an expert from the Ministry of Defence. Our team demonstrated by analysis of the initial phase of the epidemic how it could be brought under control. Once I had reported this to the PM, he decided to hand control over, and I went on TV every day to explain what we were doing. Within a few days the epidemic was declining exponentially.

We took several decisions that resulted in changes still in place today. I explained to

the PM that each government department needed its own CSA. Today, virtually every department has one. I also refocused the government's "Foresight programme" on building scenarios well into the future. Experts were brought in: on infectious diseases, we saw 340 of them visit from around the world. The idea was that we should never be faced with an out-of-the-blue epidemic again.

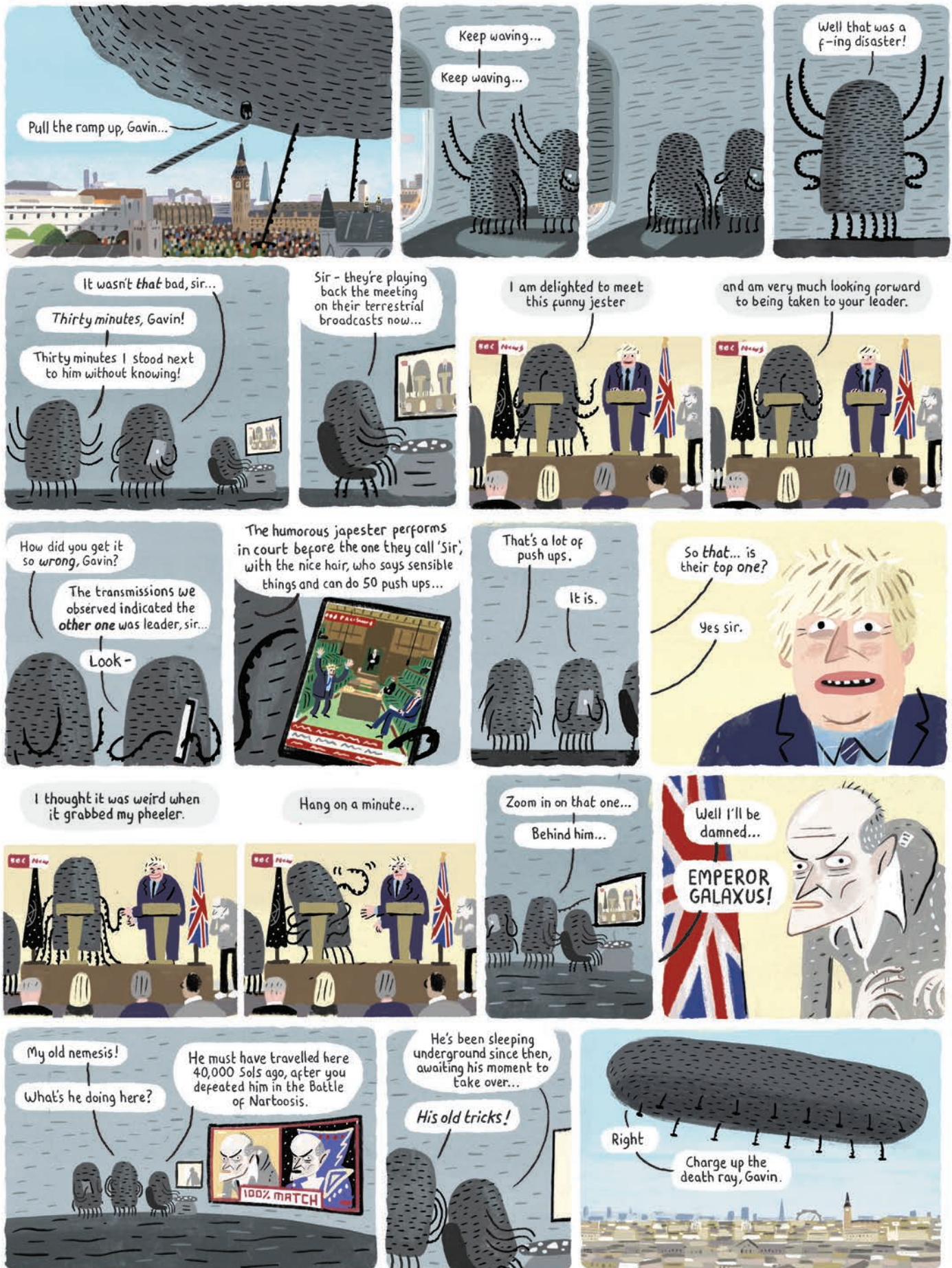
The Infectious Diseases Foresight Programme showed a pandemic was very likely to arise from the mutation of a virus from a wild animal to humans before 2030, and would reach every country due to air travel, and since humans would have no immunity it could be as deadly as the Spanish flu. The final function was to give the government advice on actions to be taken. We advised countries to put in place preparations. The WHO was represented on that programme, and its advice issued in early February this year very effectively instructed all countries on how to handle the situation. Devastatingly, some countries did not follow this, particularly the UK.

Regrettably, I must conclude many advantages of giving advice through the CSAs have been lost since a new command-and-control system was introduced in 2010, with every media request vetted by No 10. In the current pandemic, there has been controversy about political advisers attending the Science Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE), and even membership was not initially published, let alone the advice. Today, the scientific advisers are still not free to be interviewed in the public domain.

This is one reason why Independent SAGE, the alternative advisory group, was established. We wanted to provide transparent advice to the government and public. The members are drawn from healthcare, epidemiology and behavioural sciences. This is our biggest health challenge for 100 years. With a stronger, transparent SAGE system in place, tens of thousands of lives would not have been lost, and our economy would already be on the road to recovery.

David King, chair of Independent SAGE, was government chief scientific adviser 2000-7

All three pieces here are edited extracts from essays published online; find the full pieces at prospectmagazine.co.uk





AT LAW

Lawyers: as culpable as any slaver

David Allen Green

A slave is a human being who is the property of someone else: a human being who can be owned, bought and sold just like other forms of property. Property rights, in turn, depend on being recognised and enforceable by a system of law.

Of course, a person can be kept captive by brute force and forced to work on pain of violence, and this too perhaps can be called slavery. But for slavery to be sustainable in any organised society, the complicity of laws and lawyers is required. A system of slavery needs to have laws and lawyers to make it work.

Slave owners and traders such as Edward Colston, whose statue was recently toppled in Bristol, were not on some frolic of their own. They were part of a wider enterprise in which many others in British society were complicit. They were practical businesspeople supported by specialist banks and insurers, supplied by expert chain and weapon makers, and advised by attorneys and barristers on how to avoid and minimise risk in their commerce in human flesh.

Few at the time thought any of this exceptional. Slaves were regarded as chattels or even as investment opportunities. Ownership of a slave in the faraway plantations was as normal then as, say, owning a timeshare in Spain would be now. Slave ownership was prevalent throughout society, and not just the preserve of a few wealthy merchants in Liverpool and Bristol.

There is a comforting national myth promoted by some commentators and politicians that slavery was not known to English law. Certain 18th-century cases are pointed to as deciding that slavery was always repugnant to the common law. But this is not correct: English law was quite at ease with slavery until its abolition across the Empire in 1834. This is demonstrated by the immense compensation arrangements that were required for the abolition to happen. If slavery was already unlawful, then what were the slave owners being compensated for losing?

The celebrated cases of the 1700s touched on what rights a slave owner could assert if their slave happened to be on British soil. The sordid practice was fine, as

long as owners exercised their property rights from afar.

Other legal cases reveal how the horrors of slavery were normalised. In the *Zong* shipping case of 1784, the court heard how in order to protect a ship and its crew with depleted onboard supplies, slaves had been thrown overboard to drown. The commercial law issue for the court to rule on was whether the cargo owners could make a claim on the insurance policy. The judges took their decisions on a technical point of evidence, and nobody concerned in the case made any objection to slavery as a matter of principle. The insurer defendants certainly did not object, even if they disputed this case, as they were as much a part of the overall slavery system as the cargo owners who brought the case.

“The focus on individual traders, like Colston, means lawyers who facilitated the trade are out of sight”

Any doubts that human beings could be property had much earlier been waived aside with a formal legal statement of 1729 by the two law officers of the Crown—the attorney general and solicitor general. The so-called “*Yorke-Talbot Opinion*” was, in substance, little more than an assertion that the practice was acceptable with no authorities cited. But with this endorsement by the British state, practical people saw no need to give the matter a second thought.

And once you know about how deep and wide slave ownership was before 1834, many familiar things become disconcerting. Fine Georgian squares, great public schools, handsome Oxbridge colleges and the Inns of Court: many of these things have hidden foundations at least in part in slave ownership. The social satires of Jane Austen are more sharply excruciating when you realise what many of the estates of her characters were ultimately based on.

Even after the abolition of 1834, British economic development depended in part

on the slaves held elsewhere and then, later in the 19th and early 20th century, on the annexation of properties belonging to others, the very essence of imperialism. And at each step, lawyers and others were there to counsel those who were seeking to commercially exploit such misery.

No doubt many of those involved considered themselves then just as kind as we consider ourselves now. One could own, buy and sell slaves, and profit from their exertions, without ever encountering anyone actually enslaved, as they were far away in the “Indies” and out of mind as well as sight.

Understanding the complicity and connivance of law and lawyers (and of society generally) is essential to filling out the picture of the past. The archives show how central the miseries of slavery and imperialism were to our national history: the evidence is there in the detailed legal instruments, inventories and other business records that were needed to sustain them. There are shelves of volumes of ledgers of everyday bookkeeping and due diligence. They constitute our own version of the “banality of evil,” as Hannah Arendt described a later bureaucratic system of methodical horror.

The current focus on individual traders, like Colston, means that those who facilitated and enabled the trade, such as lawyers and other advisers, are out of sight. Systems make the difference. In more modern times, the police officer who abuses their power does so because he or she knows that they will probably get away with it: the system is rigged against anybody facing real accountability.

The wider legal system means that bad things can easily happen. Laws and due process are never neutral in their application, even if legal equality is the ideal.

Slaves could be thrown overboard just as a police officer can now kneel on a black man’s neck, because the legal system will operate so as to protect those inflicting the harm. The system of law is better at protecting those abusing power more than those they are dealing with. Some lives, and livelihoods, matter—and some do not.

David Allen Green is a lawyer and journalist



VIEW FROM BRAZIL

A stadium of the dead

Julia Blunck

Who should we blame for Brazil's death toll? According to the local press, coronavirus deaths now exceed 65,000. And this can only be an underestimate, thanks to a severe lack of proper testing and an even more severe surplus of statistical massaging by smart bureaucracy. A lack of autopsies, for example, often obscures the cause of death, which makes deaths from the virus hard to pick out. Right now, the country obsessed with football metaphors could fill a stadium with its coronavirus dead, most of them black or brown, most of them poor, all of them human beings. Who is to blame?

There is an obvious culprit, of course. With the debatable exception of Donald Trump, Jair Bolsonaro has taken the pandemic less seriously than any other world leader. At every level he has downplayed the threat, calling it "merely a flu." He pointedly broke lockdown both personally, disregarding social distancing guidelines, and politically, trying to force governors to reopen their states. He has fired not one—but two successive health ministers, the second still not permanently replaced as I write.

This behaviour should not come as a surprise. For the same reason, we should not expect it to change, even now that Bolsonaro is confirmed to have tested positive for Covid-19 himself. Bolsonaro is many things, but he has been unfailingly sincere. He told the Brazilian people, time and time again, who he was and what he believed in. Supporters who took his rhetoric to be simply rallying cries against Workers' Party welfare expansion, or strong words to emphasise law

and order, were lying to themselves. Bolsonaro is a conspiracy theorist to the core. He truly sees it as his mission to defeat not only values such as diversity and human rights, but law and, perhaps above all, science. His attachment to hydroxychloroquine as a miracle cure and his open scorn for any measures that might stop the virus are not diversionary tactics but the practice of his foundational beliefs: he sees doctors and scientists as his natural enemy.

"Indigenous tribes of the Amazon may be completely wiped out"

So it's tempting to place the blame for our stadium of the dead entirely on Bolsonaro. That would be a mistake too. The sickness of his government is only a symptom of a society that has been ailing for decades.

Coronavirus has exposed societies' failure to protect their vulnerable. In Brazil, the vulnerable could fill countless stadiums, and despite brief periods of improvement, they have been practically abandoned by its governments. In the north of the country, where hospitals were the first to collapse, there are serious concerns that many indigenous tribes of the Amazon may be completely wiped out. In Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, the residents of the favelas are having to choose whether to risk their lives or starve their children. Across the country, governors persist in reopening states where cases spiral up, take no measures to address the risks to the homeless, and ignore the lack of protective equipment in public hospitals.

For most countries, defeating the virus seems like the first step towards a painful economic recovery. For Brazil, however, talk of even a painful recovery is too optimistic; part of the reason why the Covid-19 crisis cannot be addressed is that misery had been increasing for years before the crisis hit, a combination of wrecking-ball austerity measures and political mismanagement. Bolsonaro's right-hand man, the economy minister Paulo Guedes, has responded to the emergency with extraordinary lethargy. The support programme of R\$600 (about £90) for Brazilians who lost income during the pandemic has helped some in the most deprived areas, but the delays in its rollout caused widespread problems and anxiety.

The damage of coronavirus has also been political. Even before Bolsonaro fell ill, he found himself cornered by governors, Congress, his own former allies and a failing economy—the country was left without leadership. This vacuum wasn't insignificant. It meant that the energy that should have been focused on managing the crisis was frittered away on Bolsonaro's campaign to save himself politically.

Brazil will survive coronavirus. And it will survive the coming economic crisis: it has faced many of them before, and it will face many more. These facts are not reasons for optimism. Brazilians have been living with crises and poverty since before the idea of Brazil existed. The dead will be buried, but the country will survive, along with the conditions that allowed both the deadly pandemic and the diseased politics to grow so wildly out of control.

Julia Blunck is a Brazilian translator and writer



There is concern that indigenous people are at huge risk of being wiped out by coronavirus, as hospitals in the north collapse under high demand. Bolsonaro played down the seriousness of the disease, but has now fallen ill himself

Speed data

How racist is Britain?

TOM CLARK
& ANTHONY HEATH

With race top of the agenda, how much disadvantage do minorities in Britain actually face? For some ethnicities, the data is encouraging: British Indians now achieve on average better exam results and hourly pay than white Britons. But the picture is very different for others, especially Bangladeshis and—pertinently just now—black people.

The first chart illustrates some of the raised risks they face: school exclusion, unemployment and—to a staggering degree—being stopped and searched. None of this looks good, but is it only racism at play, or could there be other factors, such as concealed class disadvantage? In the US, the sociologist Robert Putnam has argued: “class, not race, is the dominant—and becoming more dominant—dimension of difficulty.”

Ask Britons directly about their own prejudice, and you find a sharp reduction in unease about a relative marrying someone from another race. But even in a society where racism is less acceptable, chart two shows a hard core still admits to thinking that some races are less intelligent and a large minority still presume some ethnicities are lazier.

It sounds like a recipe for disadvantage, and that is borne out in experiments. Otherwise identical CVs with “black” names yield fewer responses than those with “white” names, and evidence of ethnic prejudice has also been found to be haunting the housing market. **P**

SOURCES: CHART 1, OFFICIAL DATA FROM “ETHNICITY FACTS AND FIGURES” AT GOV.UK. CHART 2, CSI AT NUFFIELD FUNDED BY ESRC. CHART 3, JOBS, CSI FUNDED BY EU HORIZON2020; HOUSING, LARGE-SCALE FIELD EXPERIMENT CARRIED OUT BY THE GUARDIAN

1 Excess risks

Official data records that some problems affect black people more—at school, at work and on the streets

Various hazards for black people, drawn relative to that for white Britons

Exclusion at school
BLACK CARIBBEAN ONLY



+84% risk

57 per 1,000 white pupils
105 per 1,000 black pupils

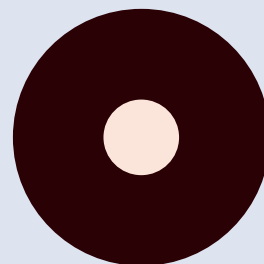
Unemployment



+125% risk

4 per 100 white workers
9 per 100 black workers

Stop and search



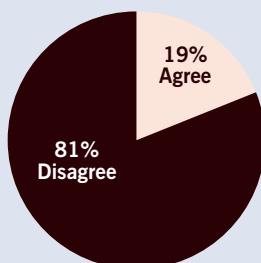
+1,170% risk

3 per 1,000 white people
38 per 1,000 black people

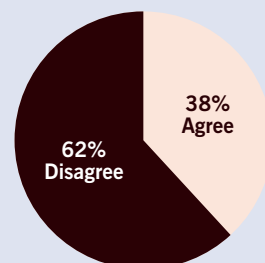
2 Persistent prejudice

A 2019 nationally representative online survey (for Nuffield College Oxford's Centre for Social Investigation) reaffirmed the grip of racist thinking among a significant portion of the population

Some races or ethnic groups are born
less intelligent

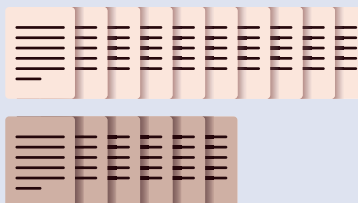
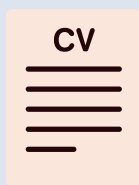


Some races or ethnic groups are born
less hard-working



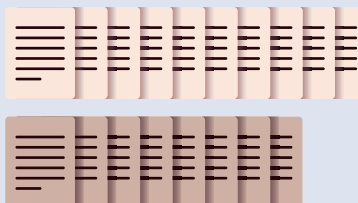
3 What's in a name?

Unspoken and even unconscious prejudice can produce discrimination. Field experiments which send identical applications under different names pin down the gap in treatment



For every **10** positive replies an applicant with a white British name (James or Emily) received from an employer...

...One with a black African name (Akintunde or Adeola) received only **6**



For every **10** positive replies “David” received for an expression of interest in a private flatshare...

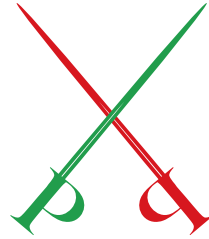
...“Muhammad” received only **8**

The Duel

Should we aim to get the economy back to “business as usual”?



Paul Wallace
YES



Ann Pettifor
NO

YES It is tempting, when living through a once-in-a-century event such as the coronavirus pandemic, to say everything must change: that it's time to tear up the rulebook and to create a completely new kind of economy. Tempting, but wrong. In fact, what we need is to rebuild the existing capitalist economy, which for all its faults has been an engine for greater prosperity not just in Britain but around the world.

The measures taken to suppress the pandemic have already exacted a huge economic cost as GDP has collapsed. The full reckoning in higher unemployment will follow. The overwhelming priority must be to try to claw back the ground that has been lost. A sustainable recovery is indispensable if we are to minimise the social harm from lost jobs and lower living standards.

The crisis has highlighted the value we put on health and exposed the failings of social care, making the case for more funding of these vital services. But that will require more public money. That in turn will require a buoyant economy. It's fashionable to decry GDP, but it is the tax base that generates the revenues needed to finance the public services and to pay for welfare.

The pandemic has alerted us to other risks, notably that of climate change. Tackling this is a global endeavour, but Britain can play its part by greening its economy. That will require massive investments, both public and private, in new infrastructure, which will be far easier to make in a growing economy.

No man is an island, wrote John Donne. Britain will not be able to recover from this crisis unless its trading partners do as well. Even before the pandemic struck, globali-

sation was in trouble. But the way out of this mess requires a restoration of international trade that helps to spread prosperity around the world, rather than a blinkered retreat into economic nationalism.

NO It is not mere temptation, Paul, to call for a transformation of the economy. It is justified panic. We need to change the system if we are to prevent the collapse of life on earth; end high levels of unemployment, trade wars and obscene levels of inequality; prevent the build-up of gluts of manufactured goods and stop rising levels of indebtedness.

“Unlike the crisis of 2008, you can't blame financial markets for the current emergency”

You're right, no woman is an island, and nor is any economy. The “existing capitalist economy” you are keen to “rebuild” is a ramshackle globalised economy, whose foundations are based on fickle markets in money, goods and services. After Richard Nixon unilaterally dismantled the Bretton Woods system in 1971, no effort was made to rebuild a new international architecture.

Instead, the “invisible hand,” like Goethe's Sorcerer's Apprentice, “magicked” a system that prioritises the interests of creditors, investors and speculators. While the system has massively enriched the few, it has produced unpayable levels of debt relative to global income.

“Rentierism” has ramped up the wealth gap over a generation or more, as those who own assets, including debt, made massive capital gains effortlessly, while those who work by hand and brain have suffered job losses, falling incomes or insecure, low-paid work. To compensate, workers were encouraged to borrow. As we know, that ended with an almighty crash. But even this didn't prompt us to organise an economy where people could earn reasonable livings: comparing the nine post-crisis years with the nine before it, pay growth halved across the OECD. Debts and insecurity led to social tensions, demands for protectionism, rising nationalism and even authoritarianism.

Most frightening is what the existing system has done to the environment. Since 1990, according to Kevin Anderson of Manchester University, global CO2 emissions from energy and industry have risen by 62 per cent, pumping an additional 870bn tonnes of the gas into the atmosphere. Global heating will destroy economies. We have no choice but to radically and urgently transform globalised capitalism.

YES I share your concern about climate change, Ann, and am neither blind nor indifferent to the other issues that you raise, such as inequality. But you can't fix these problems with an economy on its knees. That's why the immediate goal must be to generate as swift a recovery as is possible, without inflicting a further calamity by allowing the epidemic to rip out of control again.

If the British economy is to get back on its feet, a wider international recovery will

be essential. You characterise the global economy as “ramshackle” and founded on fickle markets. But unlike the banking crisis of 2008 you can’t blame the financial markets for the current emergency. As for the markets in goods and services, there is nothing capricious about the benefits that trade brings. What was hurting the international economy before the pandemic was the rise in protectionism. What was hurting the British economy was the rupture in our crucial trading relationship with Europe through Brexit.

Yes, there is plenty to do in making things work better for those in Britain left behind by globalisation. But if we want, for example, to tackle low pay then we must get to the root of the problem: poor skills. That means spending more not just on schools and universities but also on vocational colleges that have so long been the Cinderella of education. That extra call on taxpayers will realistically be available only in a growing economy.

The same logic holds for other pressing needs such as first mending and then improving the health service. The government can borrow freely during the pandemic, not least because the Bank of England has stepped into the breach with a vastly expanded programme of asset purchases. But beyond the present crisis the health of the public finances is inextricably linked to the vibrancy of the economy.

Growth is not the enemy but the friend of reforms, including those so urgently needed to arrest global warming.

NO We are agreed a swift recovery is vital. But what form should recovery take? Your emphasis on “growth” is a point on which we must part company. Economists must finally acknowledge something well understood by physicists: the planet has limits. “Growth” in economics (if not in nature) is conceived of as boundless and potentially exponential, and as such is delusional. Within the finite boundaries of the ecosystem, economic expansion must be limited.

Growth was first heavily promoted by the OECD of the 1960s. As the TUC’s Geoff Tily has documented, “growth” and the deregulation of international capital went hand-in-hand. Globalised economic activity was expected to expand at the same exponential rate as deregulated capital gains.

The consequences were unfortunate. Expanding rates of growth led to vast quantities of carbon dioxide pumped into the atmosphere. The deregulation of international finance led to periodic and increasingly frequent financial crises.

If we are to recover in environmentally and economically sustainable ways, then we should take Keynes’s advice in “National Self-Sufficiency.” He called for

the domestication of finance (“let finance be national”) and to “let goods be home-spun.” That meant the “conscious and deliberate management” by public authorities of capital mobility and the domestic banking and credit system, to allow a focus on *domestic* economic activity. International trade would cease to be “a desperate expedient to maintain employment at home by forcing sales on foreign markets...”

My proposed economic strategy for recovery is first, the domestication of finance (so that billionaires and corporations are blocked from moving capital gains abroad to escape tax obligations) and second, the domestication of the economy. Greater self-sufficiency will require higher levels of job creation. Full employment will generate income for the employed and tax revenues for government—supplemented by taxes paid by billionaires like Richard Branson. Said tax revenues can be used to “balance the books.” It is not rocket science.

“Growth in economics is conceived of as limitless—and as such is delusional”

YES We may agree upon the need for a swift recovery, but we are at odds about how to achieve it. Now is not the time to try to reshape the economy through the sweeping reforms you advocate. The crisis has dug a deep hole in GDP and the immediate imperative is to fill it as swiftly as possible. That is vital in order to avoid a potentially disastrous rise in unemployment.

Beyond the next year or so, GDP growth remains indispensable, not least in providing the tax revenues needed to finance better public services. It must be clean growth, and this is within our reach. There has been a “conscious uncoupling” of GDP growth and carbon emissions in Britain over the past three decades. The Committee on Climate Change argued last year that with stronger policies and more urgent delivery, the UK could meet a net-zero target for greenhouse gases by 2050 with a minimal impact on GDP. When you include the benefits, such as cleaner air and the potential gains to the British economy by being an early mover in low-carbon technologies, such a revolution could boost rather than detract from growth.

Turning in on ourselves, as you advocate with your call for the “domestication” of the economy, is the last thing that we should do at this juncture. International trade provides bigger markets and opportunities for British firms and it expands choice for consumers. An open global trading system remains vital because it underpins the international co-operation that is essential in tackling climate change and other

pressing problems, which is why leaving the EU is such a backward step.

Now is not the time to panic but to be steadfast in recognising the underlying strengths of the market economy, while directing it to a greener and fairer future.

NO I fear we are going to fundamentally disagree on international trade. The pandemic has shown the risks associated with long supply-lines, and with a country’s inability to supply its own essential pharmaceuticals and PPE. The global movement of goods requires the expansion of increasingly complex systems of shipping routes and air traffic. According to professors Ian Goldin and Mike Mariathasan in *The Butterfly Defect*, in 2008 world container port traffic surpassed the threshold of 500m TEUs (twenty-foot equivalent units) for the first time and was seven times greater than in 1988. It rose to almost 800m TEUs by 2018. World air travel has more than doubled since the mid-1990s. That is reflected in the rise in greenhouse gas emissions—putting human survival at risk.

Another flaw of our financialised global economy is that it leads to imbalances, the most notable of which is over-production (witness gluts in oil, cars, steel, aluminium, diesel, clothing) matched by a contraction of purchasing power, produced by policies to curtail the bargaining power of labour. Since the German government slashed wages to make German exports more competitive, the rest of Europe has suffered trade and financial imbalances, with German workers unable to purchase the goods and services they themselves produce.

And therein lie the greatest challenges—inequality and the imbalances of over-production and falls in purchasing power. The system is designed to concentrate economic power in the hands of the globalised finance sector, and the evidence is clear: the 1 per cent are now in command of phenomenal wealth, while the majority suffer stagnant real incomes.

I stand by my case for greater self-sufficiency as a solution to over-production and trade, finance and ecological imbalances. In the short term, and to address inequality, we need to urgently increase the purchasing power of the majority, but especially those on whom we rely for our survival—nurses, cleaners and carers in the health and social services. Only the government can do that, by raising pay, skills and standards, and by obliging the private sector to follow. Until then, there can be no hope of sustainable recovery. **■**

Paul Wallace is the former European economics editor of the Economist. He is the author of “The Euro Experiment” (CUP)

Ann Pettifor is a political economist. Her latest book is “The Case for the Green New Deal” (Verso)



The world's top

50

thinkers for the
Covid-19 age

INTRODUCTION BY TOM CLARK

ILLUSTRATIONS BY RICH FAIRHEAD

For details
on how to cast
your vote,
see p32

There is nothing like an emergency to make you realise the value of practical ideas. When the chips are down, and death rates are up, the world wants answers—especially from its sharpest thinkers.

As *Prospect* revisits the task of identifying the leading minds of the moment, in the intellectual hit parade which we have produced in varying formats since 2004, that test of immediate and real-world relevance looms large. As we compiled our longlist—drawing on the advice of distinguished experts in various fields who have written for us over the years—and then whittled it down towards 50, we were struck by how different the list looked from 2019's. It was at the point where we had around 35 confirmed names that we noticed not one of them was a holdover.

A measure of churn was expected—we put a premium on new books and recent interventions, after all—but not a wholesale changing of the guard. Having previously been sceptical of those claims that Covid-19 would “change everything”—why would it?—I suddenly felt there was something in them. We decided to make a virtue of the disruption, and produce an entirely new list for a shaken world that is beginning to reset.

The immediate relevance of some of our thinkers to the Covid-19 era speaks for itself: vaccinologist Sarah Gilbert and science writer Ed Yong being prime examples. Just as interesting, however, are those who work in fields a mile away from medicine, but who have nonetheless acquired a new salience in the dark and peculiar circumstances of 2020.

In economics, after the sudden stop followed by all the stimulus and bailouts, we are plainly going to need to talk about debt. Having something to say on that helps two of our big brains—Stephanie Kelton and Thomas Piketty—earn a place on the list. In public policy, with a staggering proportion of the workforce furloughed, there is a sense that the hour of the godfather of the Universal Basic Income movement, Philippe Van Parijs, might at last have come. Likewise, the polymathic thoughts of Ari Ezra Waldman on the problems of privacy in a digital age rocket up the agenda when governments everywhere are grappling with intrusive “track-and-trace” schemes. And in politics, while New Zealand prime minister Jacinda Ardern had already shown creativity in developing a governing ethos of “kindness,” it always sounded rather airy—until she showed how it could be put to practical effect in the coronavirus context, and achieved some of the world's best results.

So all-encompassing has been the disruption that many varied and otherwise unrelated minds have found new ways to shine: Sally Rooney moved from the page to the TV screen, and kept us culturally (and tearfully) engaged in lockdown; Eric Yuan Zoomed in from relative obscurity as his video platform became the virtual meeting room, as well as the substitute pub.

Other—more enduring—implications will eventually flow from the chance the lockdown gave us to reset. In the arts, different sorts of names come to the fore: names like Jenny Odell, for example, who uses discarded everyday objects to invite mindful meditation on the transience of our day-to-day lives and how they fit (or don't fit) with nature.

Spending time away from the usual bustle, and perhaps in the garden, has raised environmental consciousness. So, too, has the jolt to reflect afresh on how all the life, health and happiness that civilisation affords hangs by a thread. We duly hail all manner of minds that engage with ecology, whether that be through the critical thinking of Timothy Morton, the rigorous popularisation of David Attenborough or Carlota Perez's thoughts on how the economy can be steered in a greener direction as it splutters back into life.

A spell of enforced solitude will also turn the mind to the question of who “we” really are—and prompt it to interrogate all the old stories about where we come from. Although it was catalysed by police brutality in the US, it may be no coincidence that the history wars over statue-toppling took hold this year. Thaddeus Metz, Angela Saini, Cornell West, Olivette Otele and William Dalrymple are all top thinkers with things to say about the many warped consequences that can result from one culture subjugating another; Ross Douthat, meanwhile, is a thoughtful conservative voice who cautions us against allowing frenzied arguments about identity to silence discussion.

“This year we have produced an *entirely* new list for a shaken world that is beginning to reset”

There are some names here whose special interest it would be contrived to put down to Covid-19. But even here—coming back to my starting point—amid a mood of anxious uncertainty, they have to earn their place by way of practical relevance, even if that is relevance to the big contemporary challenges that existed before the virus. Challenges like, say, the rise of China (Julia Lovell), the decline of the west (Anne Applebaum), the politics of personality (Hilary Mantel) or the twin threats to the rule of law and sound constitutional governance (Bruce Ackerman, Dahlia Lithwick, Philippe Sands).

The diversity of the list is rich. It contains a preponderance of women for the first time ever, and pleasingly mixes brilliant young minds (Lisa Piccirillo) with a couple of nonagenarians.

While it also includes a good mix of liberal, socialist and conservative voices, I can anticipate one objection in the absence of any thinker who can truly be said to have emerged from within the global populist insurgency associated with Donald Trump. We have thought long and hard about this. We have run and will continue to run pieces by nostalgic writers who reject globalisation. We make space for serious minds who rage about all the communities it has left behind (see Paul Collier, on p50). But as the Trumpian project becomes ever-more nakedly anti-intellectual and anti-reason, we struggle to regard even intelligent individuals who choose to defend it as serious thinkers. Some readers may take a different view, and see more substance in “nativism.” But for me, Steve Bannon and his like are cynics; the value of ideas for them is purely instrumental, for use in power play.

With that one caveat, the mix is something to marvel at. The range of intellectual endeavours is a reminder of the breadth of human genius. I hope you'll enjoy finding out more about the thinkers who strike us as most pertinent to our age as much as we on the inside of *Prospect* did. Salute them and take the chance to cast a vote (details at the end of the package) to help crown a top thinker for 2020. We'll publish the full results in our next issue. Oh, and please don't miss the chance to tell us who we missed—there's a space on the voting form. Because with the liveliest minds and the biggest questions, there is never a final answer. Long may human beings continue to discuss, disagree—and think!

Tom Clark is editor of *Prospect*





Bruce Ackerman

Constitutional scholar

The turbulence of the last few years will eventually settle—but into what? The shape of tomorrow's politics depends on how this moment “constitutionalises.” If Boris Johnson's prorogation wheeze sets a precedent, or Donald Trump's judicial bench-packing continues much longer, liberal democracy is in trouble. Its defenders need to swot up on how constitutions can go wrong—and right. Bruce Ackerman, a Yale professor who's just as informed on De Gaulle, Mandela and Wafesa as he is on America's founders, is a sure guide. His “popular sovereignty initiative” to rationalise the process for amending the US constitution could put principled reformers back on the front foot.



Elizabeth Anderson

Philosopher

She started out in economics before abandoning a field she had come to view as ethically barren, and has since combined philosophy with the social sciences to analyse the power structures around us—and, as an excited *New Yorker* puts it, “redefine equality.” Her interest in race and gender is urgently relevant in 2020, and her refreshing take on the Protestant work ethic (which she insists has a progressive pro-labour side as well as a conservative materialism) underpins a powerful account of modern workplace relations. Always confronting the world as it truly is rather than how we would like it to be, she won a MacArthur “genius grant” in 2019.



Anne Applebaum

Historian

The American international order is crumbling. Its opponents always suspected it was mere cover for US imperialism, and the sudden swerve of many former enthusiasts to support the narrow chauvinism of Trump's “America First” slogan encourages that dark view. Applebaum, long an authority on the abuses of Communist and post-Communist Eastern Europe, in her new book *Twilight of Democracy* is unsparing in exposing the moral bankruptcy of Trumpian Republicanism. Her sharp pen is as persuasive as any in presenting the idea of the “west” as a morally serious project—and one whose loss we may come to mourn.



Jacinda Ardern

Prime minister of New Zealand

By bringing her baby to the UN General Assembly she grabbed the world's attention, but over three years in office Ardern has proved to be more than a media favourite. Her “ethos of kindness” sounded a vague way to transcend neoliberalism, but she's steadily shown what it means in fields from child welfare to the environment. Her instinctive, bridge-building leadership after the Christchurch mosque massacre was an inspiration. And her Covid-19 strategy—devised in lockstep with chief scientist Juliet Gerrard—built with intelligence and empathy on a foundation of unflinching honesty to achieve some of the world's best results.



David Attenborough

Environmentalist

Not all climate-change activists are Swedish teenagers. At 94, David Attenborough is one of the country's—if not the world's—most influential thinkers on the environment. Just as the Extinction Rebellion protests were taking off last year, Attenborough presented the hour-long documentary *Climate Change: The Facts*, which relied on his authority to convey the truth about what we're doing to the planet. For decades his documentaries have alerted millions to the precious wonders of the animal and plant kingdoms, and the threat that humans pose to them. No longer confined to the BBC, his eight-part Netflix series *Our Planet* brought him even closer to truly global domination.



William Dalrymple

Historian

The Scottish historian, long resident in India, has made it his life's work to reckon with the legacy of the British Empire in the subcontinent. His recent book *The Anarchy* is a barnstorming account of the East India Company, the corporation that launched the hostile takeover. Dalrymple describes Robert Clive—whose newly-controversial statue remains next to the Foreign Office—as a man of “extreme aggression and devil-may-care-audacity.” But Dalrymple also points to Indian complicity with the British, as well as to the many atrocities of local princes. In polarised times, in which one side acquits the Empire of its crimes, and the other blames imperialism for every last human wickedness, his work is an important corrective.



Jared Diamond

Geographer

Twenty-three years ago in *Guns, Germs and Steel*, the polyglot professor (whose scholarship has ranged from human physiology to ornithology and anthropology) drew our attention to how far disease had shaped world civilisations. In *Upheaval* last year, he looked at how societies can recover from catastrophes such as invasion, political collapse or mass death. Just as individuals need to develop strategies of resilience, he argues, so too should countries. “The challenge, for nations as for individuals in crisis, is to figure out which parts of their identities are already functioning well and don’t need changing, and which parts are no longer working and do need changing.” Within months, Covid-19 made his argument urgent.



Ross Douthat

Columnist

The opinion pages of the *New York Times* have become a battleground in the culture wars. In June, a Republican senator’s provocative call to “Send in the troops” on Black Lives Matter protesters caused a newsroom revolt. The most eloquent conservative voice in the *NYT* is Ross Douthat, whose cogent analysis of the farrago was a qualified defence of the paper’s liberal values—strident, even unpalatable views need to be aired, he argued. Douthat, a traditional Catholic, is also a critic of modern secularism, as he argues in his new book *The Decadent Society*. But he is no fan of the US president. In a recent op-ed, he argued that “Trump will be an accelerant of the right’s erasure, an agent of its marginalisation and defeat.”



Esther Duflo

Economist

Economics is often caricatured as being more interested in pounds than people and derided for getting lost in theoretical dead-ends. This Frenchwoman rescues the discipline from both charges. Duflo applies randomised trials to urgent policy questions with huge human significance in the developing world—questions such as how to encourage decent basic education, keep malaria at bay and, pertinently for our Covid-19 world, boost vaccine take-up. (She suggests incentives as modest as a bag of lentils.) At just 46 when she claimed the Nobel Prize in economics last year—together with husband and co-author Abhijit Banerjee, and Michael Kremer—she is an exceptionally young but richly deserving winner.



David Frum

Political commentator

Although still registered as a big-R Republican, David Frum is much less interested in party politics than little-R republicanism—his concern is the spirit of American democracy and the health of its republic. In his journalism the former George W Bush speechwriter has, from early on, been one of the clearest-sighted conservative critics of Trump—his personal lack of principle and venality, certainly, but also his potential to trash the standing of his office and the possibility of compromise. Frum’s biggest worry, outlined in his book *Trumpocalypse*, is less the disastrous 45th president winning in November than his political poison lingering for many years after his defeat.



Greta Gerwig

Filmmaker

Originally known as a Hollywood actress and muse to *Marriage Story* director and partner Noah Baumbach, Gerwig has since proven herself to be a masterly screenwriter and director. Her 2017 coming-of-age drama *Lady Bird* won universal critical acclaim. That led to her most recent project adapting Louisa May Alcott’s classic novel *Little Women* for the big screen. At a time when everyone has been locked down with family, her work invites searching questions about our closest relationships. Her snubbing in Hollywood’s recent awards season attests to stubborn sexism in the industry, but the success of her films shows that things are changing.



Sarah Gilbert

Vaccinologist

Decades of work on malaria, flu and then Mers readied this Oxford vaccinologist to do battle with the new coronavirus pandemic. Just as important was the preparatory thinking she had done about how to handle an unknown potential “disease X,” and the way she has galvanised her team. Moving beyond the old reliance on antibody responses, she pursues a proactive approach to vaccine design—tapping recombinant DNA techniques and homing in on T-cell responses. With safe-to-handle “viral vectors” speeding research, Gilbert energetically seeks a smart way through the slow protocols of academic medicine to speed up the application. Her work could—with luck—lead to a successful inoculation programme within months. ▶



Ruth Wilson Gilmore

Prison abolitionist

Could we live in a world without prisons? For lifelong abolitionist Ruth Wilson Gilmore the answer is an emphatic yes. A seasoned campaigner against the “prison-industrial complex,” who now works in academia, Gilmore has spent the best part of 30 years developing the field of carceral geography: the study of the interrelationships across space, institutions and political economy that shape and define modern incarceration. She’s helped shift the conversation about responses to crime from one of punishment to rehabilitation. As the failings of the US justice system come once again to the fore, Gilmore’s radical ideas have never felt more relevant.



Jürgen Habermas

Sociologist and philosopher

Having come of age listening to the Nuremberg trials, Habermas, now 91, has always been seized by the urgency of defending fundamental notions like an open public sphere and the idea of truth, through post-modern decades during which the academy grew complacent and self-indulgent. The last of the generation of Rawls and Foucault, both of whom he sparred with, his breathtaking range is on show in a new history of philosophy. Despite warning that “a post-truth democracy... would no longer be a democracy,” in dark times he still retains faith in the ability of human discussion to advance the common good.



Martin Hägglund

Atheist philosopher

Can you lead a spiritual life without being religious? The Swedish atheist thinker takes up the challenge in his book *This Life*. For Hägglund, the meaning of existence does not lie in an imaginary afterlife but in the fact of death: “the apprehension that we will die” makes meaningful the question of what we do with our time on earth. Erudite and provocative, Hägglund’s philosophy aims to plug the God-shaped hole gap in the lives of atheists, and has become more relevant as death once more stalks the developed western world. The *Prospect* review of his book wondered, though, whether the questions he asks have really been as foreign to religious thinking as he imagines.

“Lithwick is the outstanding scrutineer of the US Supreme Court, but qualifies as a true world thinker because of her subtle and penetrating analysis of the rule of law”



NK Jemisin

Novelist

Science-fiction writer NK Jemisin broke records when all three novels in her Broken Earth trilogy won a prestigious Hugo Award for best novel between 2016 and 2018. Her work creates a fully-imagined universe to explore some of the great themes of our times—climate change, racial oppression and split identities. Jemisin, remarkably the first African American to win the Hugo, has criticised the publishing industry for not being diverse enough in genre fiction. Her new novel, *The City We Became*, is a love letter to a New York under threat from alien invasion.



Bong Joon-ho

Filmmaker

The South Korean filmmaker captured headlines—and hearts and minds—when he swept this year’s Oscars. He won four trophies, including best director and best picture for *Parasite*, an upstairs-downstairs tale about a poor family meeting a rich one. Bong’s cinema—which also includes dystopian train drama *Snowpiercer* and Netflix’s *Okja*—has long dealt with class conflict and the problems of contemporary capitalism, mixing the political with a playful mastery of tone and genre. In an industry dominated by superhero blockbusters, Bong’s global success proves there is widespread appetite for something new.



Stephanie Kelton

Monetary theorist

Respectable monetary policy died when central banks turned to the printing presses to battle the Great Recession, pursuing so-called Quantitative Easing (QE). Will the Covid-19 crisis see fiscal policy go the same way? Stephanie Kelton hopes so and is finding an audience—not only because there's little appetite for more austerity. With interest rates and inflation on the floor, it's harder to argue that governments directly creating money for social programmes would necessarily spell ruin. But a free lunch today will mean inflation tomorrow warn respectable economists—including some Keynesians. Like Keynes himself, though, Kelton resets the frame and goads conventional wisdom.



Igor Levit

Pianist

At just 33 years old, Russian-German pianist Igor Levit is a superstar interpreter of the classical canon—his complete Beethoven Sonatas came out earlier this year. He's also unafraid of political gestures: at the 2017 Proms he played *Ode to Joy*, the European national anthem, in what was seen as a riposte to Brexit. In lockdown, he has pioneered live-streaming concerts on Twitter, dressed down in jeans and T-shirt, with explanations in German and English beforehand. (Check out his performance of Schubert's late B-Flat Sonata.) Few others have done as much to democratise classical music while still maintaining the highest of standards.



Dahlia Lithwick

Legal journalist

Lithwick is the outstanding scrutineer of the US Supreme Court, but qualifies as a true world thinker because of her subtle and penetrating analysis of the rule of law. Should November's election descend into foul play and end up thrown over to the courts (like Bush vs Gore in 2000) Lithwick will be a must-read. But she qualifies as a true world thinker because of her subtle and penetrating take on the rule of law. She has written, including in *Prospect*, on how that ideal consists as much in a web of mores and codes as it does in any procedure or chain of command. Trump violates these, but so—increasingly—do other rulers on a planet where political corruption could become a second pandemic.



Julia Lovell

Historian of China

Rejecting earlier revisionism, China's Xi Jinping has ruled that the Mao years and the reorientation towards state capitalism that followed are all one glorious chapter in the nation's history. With China risen, does that make the brutal revolutionary newly-relevant not just at home, but also across the world? As Cambridge historian Lovell describes in her fine book *Maoism: A Global History*, the after-effects of his ideology spread across the planet, from Vietnam to Zanzibar. Also the author of a superb account of the Opium Wars, Lovell is an acute observer of the way history is used and abused by current regimes. Xi is no sincere believer in the dictums of Mao's Little Red Book, but he does admire—and emulate—his authoritarian power play.



Helen McCarthy

Historian

The deepest assumptions shape day-to-day life without us noticing. Take a longer view, and you can spot them—and grasp how they can change. McCarthy's work exposes the oppressive power of the housewife ideal. Many mothers have long been in paid employment, but in the years between commonplace domestic servants and ubiquitous domestic appliances, they were vilified for falling short as angels in the house. Only in the last 40 years, with the help of nurseries and other childcare, have working mothers ceased to be deemed aberrant. In the lockdown, all responsibility for children was thrown back to parents, and reports suggest the burden was unequally shared—underlining the enduring power of the tropes McCarthy identifies.



Hilary Mantel

Novelist

One of the most acute analysts of the 21st century's often alarmingly personal politics is a novelist writing about Tudor England. In the concluding part of her Wolf Hall trilogy, *The Mirror and the Light*, Mantel continues her investigation into Thomas Cromwell, a canny practitioner of Machiavellian statecraft who attempted to align England with the Protestant princely states in Europe. That, as much as Henry VIII's unpredictable sexual tastes, was the reason Cromwell's career eventually unravelled. Mantel is also an eagle-eyed observer of the current royal family: her famous lecture on the Duchess of Cambridge is one of the works collected in a forthcoming collection, entitled *Mantel Pieces*.



Thaddeus Metz

Philosopher

This professor of philosophy at the University of Johannesburg is reimagining what it might mean to teach his subject in an African context. As well as the traditional syllabus (Plato etc), Metz has championed native African philosophy as an object of equal worth to study. He has defended the idea of a distinctive African moral theory based on “ubuntu,” one which values harmonious relationships and human solidarity. It should, he argues, be taken just as seriously as the work of Kant or utilitarianism. That Metz is a white American makes the project, often described as “decolonising” the curriculum, all the more intriguing.



Branko Milanović

Economist

Bean-counting can narrow horizons, but not for this Serbian-American number cruncher. Inequality used to be measured country-by-country, but he has pioneered analysis of the global income distribution, which he likens to an elephant, with a high back (fast wage-rises in mid-table China), low head (squeezed working-class wages in the west) and a rising trunk (the runaway pay of the pre-financial crisis global elite). Unlike many leftists, he diagnoses no general crisis of capitalism, instead focusing on its varieties, and the surprising way the restless insecurity of China’s political economy works to bolster growth. As Covid-19 accelerates China’s eclipse of the US, he is an indispensable guide.



Timothy Morton

Philosopher

Living in the Anthropocene turns out to require a new, less anthropocentric, vocabulary. Morton—an English professor at Rice University, Houston—provides one. A proponent of object-oriented ontology (OOO), Morton argues that “nature” or “the environment” does not, in fact, exist as we think of it, as something separate from or encompassing of civilisation. He suggests instead that all objects, from rocks to trees, live in equal and interdependent co-existence with humans. Counting singer Björk, artist Olafur Eliasson and curator and critic Hans Ulrich Obrist among his fans and collaborators, he is exerting a rare and a far-reaching impact on our intellectual and cultural imagination.



Jenny Odell

Artist

A Californian whose exhibitions have spotlighted objects discarded at landfills and the manufacturing roots of our everyday items, Odell calls us to observe the commonplace—with undivided attention. Her interests culminated in *How to Do Nothing*, a bestseller about the pleasures of resisting Big Tech’s commodification of our attention spans. It’s a philosophical meditation on what it means to live mindfully with nature at a time when powerful corporations want us to do anything but. When billions were suddenly confined to their homes this year (with nothing but social media to connect them with others), the need to rediscover how to be content doing nothing became self-evident.



Olivette Otele

Historian of slavery

Born in Cameroon and raised in France, Olivette Otele was appointed professor of the history of slavery at Bristol University last autumn—having become, at Bath Spa, the UK’s first black female history professor just the year before. She has been a keen analyst of Bristol’s impassioned debate over its long associations with slavery. In reaction to the pulling down of Edward Colston’s statue, she wrote, “many other slave traders are still celebrated in Bristol, while poverty, racism and all forms of inequalities are, more than ever, in urgent need of being tackled.” Her book *African Europeans: An Untold Story* will be published this October.



Jian-wei Pan

Physicist

China’s status as a world leader in quantum communications—which harness the strange properties of quantum physics to send ultra-secure messages—owes much to the work of Jian-wei Pan at the University of Science and Technology in Hefei. After studying in Vienna with veteran physicist Anton Zeilinger, Pan seems to have acquired an uncanny ability to make even the most ambitious projects work. Known in China as the “father of quantum,” he recently masterminded the transmission of quantum-encrypted data via China’s Micius satellite from Beijing to Graz in Austria, thereby demonstrating how a global quantum information network might be enabled.



Carlota Perez

Economic historian

As a stalled economy splutters back to life, is it doomed to lapse into bad habits—or can we create something smarter? This Venezuelan is a student of all the successive cycles of innovation—brainwave, bubble, bust and (finally) build—since the industrial revolution. Like Schumpeter, Perez sees the destruction of the old and creation of the new as inextricably linked. She fears the ecological brick wall: as she says, “we’d need three planets” for China to match US consumption patterns. But far from giving up on growth, she spies a chance to speed it through a green transition and a new consumerism focused on experiences, exercise and wellbeing.



Lisa Piccirillo

Mathematician

The “Conway knot” problem had stumped some of the world’s brightest minds for more than five decades—until graduate student Lisa Piccirillo solved it in a week. In mathematical theory, knot formations can have a property called “sliceness,” being in effect a “slice” of a higher dimensional knot. But no one knew whether the Conway knot did. Piccirillo proved it does not. Astonished colleagues say she took some convincing to recognise the scale of her achievement. Her proof was published in the *Annals of Mathematics* journal this year and MIT rushed to give her a permanent position.



Thomas Piketty

Social scientist

The Frenchman who woke the world up to inequality is back with *Capital and Ideology*, an awe-inspiring tome that explains the outsize riches of elites—from ancient Hindustan to modern Silicon Valley—in terms of the institutions and ideas that support “inequality regimes.” The analysis is always thoughtful, even if some conclusions feel politically naive. But as Covid-19 pushes governments everywhere into the red, Piketty’s long view on public debt is urgently practical. Debt can be answered by repressing and extracting from the masses (Britain after the Napoleonic wars), wished away with inflation (post-war Britain) or sustainably managed by taxing wealth (post-war Germany).



Mark Post

Lab meat pioneer

“My goal,” says Dutch pharmacologist Mark Post, “is to replace the entirety of livestock production with cultured meat.” It’s an audacious target—but one that has attracted the investment of Google co-founder Sergey Brin. It is seven years since Brin helped fund a \$325,000 burger made from in-vitro meat, created in a lab with stem cells. Now Post’s company Mosa Meat plans to make commercially viable cultured meat available to the general public by 2021. (Get your steak via a 3D printer.) It will have huge benefits for the environment—fewer cows will mean less noxious emissions—to say nothing of the animals saved from slaughter, but Post acknowledges that palates may have to adjust before McDonald’s makes the switch.



Sally Rooney

Novelist

The 29-year-old Irish literary phenomenon is seemingly unstoppable. *Normal People*, her second runaway hit after *Conversations with Friends*, is a sparsely written love story which has sold an astonishing half a million copies worldwide—a number set only to increase after she co-wrote a critically-acclaimed BBC adaptation featuring two handsome lead actors. Though praised by critics for her attention to the technological zeitgeist, Rooney is razor-sharp on the age-old interface between class and culture, and her novel is at its heart a simple story of how early passion can mature into something quite different. The world awaits what she will do next. No pressure.

“As a graduate student, Piccirillo solved a knotty problem that had stumped top mathematicians for half a century. She took some convincing to recognise the scale of her achievement”



Angela Saini

Science writer

There is the thinker who can dive into the minutiae of scientific findings, and then soar up to explain a big, contentious question—but Angela Saini is one. She has brought a sharp mind to the biology of gender, and latterly “the return of race science.” Faced with a racial gulf in Covid-19 casualties, some leap on the gap as evidence of genetic difference. Scientific minds must be open to everything, but Saini applies Occam’s razor. As events remind us anew how overwhelmingly socially-constructed racial groupings are, she suggests approaching the problem as societal—ie as flowing from social inequalities—is a simpler way to proceed.



Philippe Sands

Human rights lawyer

One of the UK’s finest international lawyers, Sands had done vital recent work on controlling arms exports and reasserting the post-colonial sovereignty of the Chagos Islands. The warnings of his magisterial post-Iraq war book, *Lawless World*, have only got more resonant. And his reputation as an author has grown with 2016’s part-historical, part-autobiographical *East West Street*, followed up this year by *The Ratline*, a piece of historical detective work which sets out to discover what happened to Nazi war criminal Otto von Wächter when he went on the run. Both showed a mind with remarkable range. Thoughtful interventions on whether we need an international inquiry into Covid-19 cap his unquestionable relevance in 2020.



KK Shailaja

Kerala health minister

The Kerala health minister, now known as “coronavirus slayer,” is credited with flattening the Covid-19 curve in April and securing a low fatality rate in the southern Indian state. Shailaja, a former high school teacher, quickly devised a programme of testing and tracing in January, which saw 170,000 people quarantined at the height of the virus. This wasn’t Shailaja’s first time warding off a potentially deadly disease. In 2018, her masterful handling of the Nipah disease saw her mythologised in a local film entitled *Virus*. The minister had her own reservations about the film, though. Her fictional counterpart, she said, “looked desperate and worried all the time... I couldn’t afford to show any fear.”



Elizabeth Spelke

Psychologist

As robots take our jobs and demonstrably outsmart us, doubts about humanity losing control of its creations are no longer the preserve of science fiction. A happy relationship between artificial and human intelligence must start with understanding their similarities and differences. Having previously demolished hoary ideas about there being distinctive male and female brains, as well as certain assumptions about innate differences between humans and other species, Harvard psychologist Elizabeth Spelke is proving to be an insightful guide. She now studies the minds of babies and with philosophical subtlety interrogates what they reveal about what is—and isn’t—special about humans.



Abby Chava Stein

Trans activist and writer

The transgender activist and author is the first openly trans woman raised in a Hasidic Jewish community. Her 2019 memoir, *Becoming Eve*, tracks her journey from ultra-Orthodox young Rabbi in Brooklyn to renegade New York political science college student, and finally 27-year-old globally recognised author and advocate. Though Stein left her community in 2012 and now identifies as an atheist, she has again embraced the Rabbi title and aspects of the role, and continues to engage critically with Judaism: “What I’m hoping is that by sharing my story, others in the same situation will realise that you can have your name in a synagogue,” she has said.



Ilona Szabó de Carvalho

Political scientist

Many problems confront Brazil at present, including one with urgent implications beyond its borders: the worst police violence in the world. An average of five people were killed per day in 2019, official records say. Ilona Szabó de Carvalho has sought to find practical ways to protect vulnerable citizens. Her Igarapé Institute—a winner at *Prospect’s* 2019 Think Tank Awards—has worked with police forces on the ground to improve monitoring, and develop digital technology to prevent abuses and increase accountability. Combined with its campaign for a sensible drugs policy and more theoretical work on law and order, she has built something worth celebrating.

“Waldman stands out as a mind who can grapple with every side of the multifaceted problem of privacy in a digital age: technological, legal and sociological”



Marina Tabassum

Architect

At the forefront of creating buildings in tune with their natural environments, this Bangladeshi architect is also embracing the design challenges posed by what we are collectively doing to the planet. She recently exhibited lightweight houses made from locally-sourced materials that perch on stilts and can be moved when the waters rise—an increasingly common occurrence in her native country. She designed the Bait Ur Rouf mosque in the capital Dhaka, made of terracotta brick—echoing the mosques from the Sultanate era—which is built on a raised platform, again to protect against flooding. The mosque won the Aga Khan Award for Architecture.



Olga Tokarczuk

Writer

Winner of the 2019 Nobel Prize in literature, Polish novelist Tokarczuk writes works which are experimental, ambitious—and also bestselling. Among them are the travel book *Flights* and *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*, a dark feminist comedy said to be inspired by William Blake. Her magnum opus finally comes out in English in 2021, six years after a mixed—and dramatic—reception at home. Lauded by critics but loathed by nationalists, *The Book of Jacob* tells the persecution-strewn story of the 18th-century Jewish messianic figure Jacob Frank, unsettling those who would rather wish away the demons of Poland's past. As politicians deepen their dalliance with nationalist myths, authors who bust them become invaluable.



Philippe Van Parijs

Godfather of the UBI movement

Dreams of “incomes for all” trace way back—Thomas Paine proposed one scheme. But even before the government picked up the wage bill for millions of furloughed workers, Universal Basic Income was an ambition coming of age. The rapid automation of labour switches the question from how national income can be earned, to how it might be distributed. Today's young UBI enthusiasts draw on the books and tap the networks of this Belgian polymath, who championed it before it was fashionable. For decades, he has warned that our proclaimed freedoms to start businesses or raise children count for nothing without the real freedom that comes with a basic income.



Ari Ezra Waldman

Privacy expert

Amid our networked lives, with video cameras in every pocket, worries about privacy—from “revenge porn” to the Edward Snowden revelations—were mounting fast, even before the intrusive demands of Covid-19 “track-and-trace” systems. Waldman stands out as a mind who can grapple with every side—technological, legal and sociological—of the multifaceted problem of privacy in a digital age. His insight is simple: personal information is something we've always been happy to share in the context of a trusting relationship. But its implication is disruptive: tech giants like Facebook, which can currently X-ray our personal lives for their own ends, should be subject to something akin to the confidentiality requirements constraining doctors and lawyers.



Stephen Wertheim

Historian

From his perch at Columbia, Wertheim has a distinctive beat—“the United States in the world.” It is an ideal angle from which to make sense of the fast-shifting tectonic plates of political geography, and he's the most interesting expert rethinking US foreign policy. Since the end of the Cold War, he believes, the US has repeatedly blown the chance to promote peace and the common good, instead continuing down an anachronistic path of military supremacy and aggression. The outcome has been not only avoidable warfare overseas, but impoverished debate at home. With polls finding younger Americans support Wertheim's anti-war stance, his ideas could soon become mainstream.



Cornel West

Philosopher

A veteran voice among African-American intellectuals, West has once again commanded global attention for his powerful commentary on the Black Lives Matter movement: “the system,” he announced in a CNN interview that went viral, “cannot reform itself.” His 40-year career has been sweeping and prodigious—West has held professorships at Harvard, Princeton and Yale, written 18 books, appeared in two *Matrix* reboots, and made his own spoken word and hip-hop albums. His belief that black liberation cannot happen without a wholesale rejection of capitalism has led to some high-profile conflicts with fellow African-American luminaries over the years, notably Barack Obama and one of 2019’s top thinkers Ta-Nehisi Coates.



Joshua Wong

Hong Kong activist

This 23-year-old activist-politician has become an icon for Hong Kong’s independence movement. In 2011, at just 14, he co-founded Scholarism, a student movement protesting proposed school curriculum changes deemed to assist the Chinese Communist Party. In 2014, he shot to global attention as one of the leading figures of the Umbrella Movement. His hopes for Hong Kong have now been shuttered, by events as well as by personal struggles—he has been jailed and denied entry to several countries. “In the future, I might not be jailed in Hong Kong anymore, I might be jailed in China, in Beijing,” he told CNBC recently. His new book *Unfree Speech: The Threat to Global Democracy and Why We Must Act* is a timely wake-up call.



Ed Yong

Science writer

When the coronavirus hit, few science writers could claim to say “I told you so.” Except, that is, the *Atlantic*’s Ed Yong, who in 2018 wrote a prescient article entitled “The Next Plague is Coming. Is America Ready?” His regular essays on Covid-19 have become essential reading for clear, informed analysis of a still-mysterious virus. In June he published a sobering account of how for some sufferers of the disease recovery has been very slow—and how it may indeed become a chronic illness. He’s also been calmly excoriating of Trump’s poor response, which has led to the US having the highest death toll in the world.



Eric Yuan

Founder of Zoom

Six months ago few of us had heard of Zoom. Now it’s an indispensable tool for communicating in lockdown—and an instantly recognisable verb. Founder and CEO Eric Yuan was born in China but moved to Silicon Valley in 1997—after first being rejected eight times for a visa. His insight was how “unhappy” scratchy video conferencing was making people; he set out to create a “cloud-native platform” to deliver a more reliable service. The 50-year-old is now worth \$10bn and counting. But it’s not all plain Zooming. Yuan has faced accusations that by running its data through Chinese servers, the company compromises its security. It is also scrabbling to find a way to stop online pranksters “Zoom-bombing” unsuspecting users.



Magdalena Zernicka-Goetz

Biologist

The exciting goal in biology is no longer just cataloguing genes and correlating them with traits, but understanding exactly how gene activity and inter-cellular communications interact to build a baby organism. Polish-British biologist Magdalena Zernicka-Goetz is at the forefront of that effort. Her Cambridge team has shown how embryo-like structures can be made “from scratch” in the lab using embryonic stem cells (which can become any tissue) and other types of stem cell. She’s been able to grow human embryos in vitro right up to the current 14-day legal limit. Aside from its profound medical implications, her work raises philosophical questions about what it means to be human.

Biographies by Philip Ball, Tom Clark, Alex Dean, Rebecca Liu, David McAllister and Sameer Rahim

How to vote

Our panel of experts and editors has chosen the shortlist of 50—now it’s over to you.

Vote for your favourite, and tell us who we missed
prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/2020-thinker

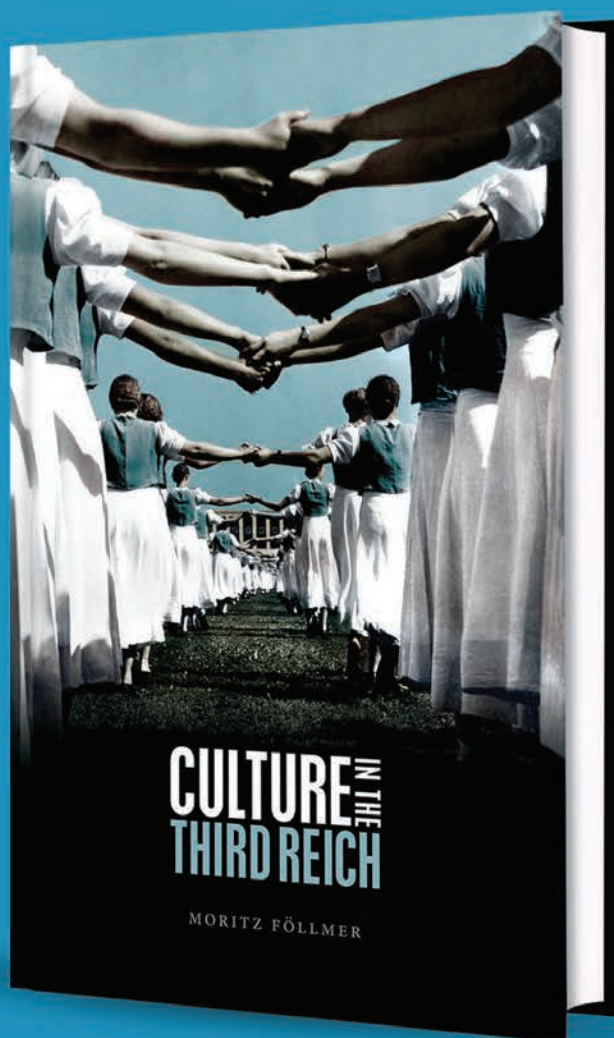
Those votes will determine the identity of *Prospect*’s top 10 of 2020. The results will be announced in the next issue.

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White lies matter



A mythological idea of Anglo-Saxon supremacy has long entrenched racial hierarchies on both sides of the Atlantic

SARAH CHURCHWELL

In June, as Black Lives Matter protests were breaking out across America in response to the murder of George Floyd, the Pentagon agreed for the first time to consider renaming 10 military forts named in honour of Confederate generals. Donald Trump—New Yorker though he may be—greeted the news with outrage, declaring his absolute determination that these government buildings should continue to be named after generals who had led a war against that government, and fought to keep black Americans enslaved.

Most of these forts were first established as training camps during the First World War, under the administration of Woodrow Wilson, the first Southern president to take office since the immediate aftermath of the Civil War. In the decades following the conflict, America had to find a way to reunify after the bitterness of the fighting—and one of the things most white Americans at the time could agree on was white supremacy.

According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, nearly 500 monuments to Confederate white supremacy were erected across the country—many in the North—between 1885 and 1915. Over half of these were built in just seven years, between 1905 and 1912. This was the period during which Confederate mythologies of the Lost Cause of the noble Southern states and leaders gained purchase not just below the Mason-Dixon line, but across the United States.

Fort Gordon in Georgia, for example, was named for General John Brown Gordon, one of Robert E Lee's most trusted generals. Gordon, who had a statue erected in his honour in the grounds of Georgia's state capitol in 1907, was according to his biographer a "Grand Dragon" of the original Ku Klux Klan. Until his death in 1904, Gordon adamantly defended plantation slavery as "morally, socially, and politically right,"

as did most of the white population in the former Confederate states. During "Redemption," the period that followed the abandonment of the radical 12-year experiment known as Reconstruction, the South was "redeemed" from the project of interracial government and put back into the sole control of white Protestant men. The federal government soon honoured those who had sought to destroy it with civic landmarks across the country. The installation of the monuments reminded African Americans that their rights meant less to the nation's leaders than did the dead white supremacists who lost a treasonous war to keep them in bondage.

The Floyd killing soon also sparked protests against racial injustice in the UK. One of these protests, in Bristol, brought down a statue of the British slave-trader Edward Colston (1636-1721), who had donated some of the profits from his lucrative dealing to civic philanthropy in London and Bristol. Colston was an official of the Royal African Company, reputed to have sold as many as 100,000 west Africans into slavery in the West Indies and the Americas.

It was almost 200 years later, in 1895, when Britons were first seeing their claims to imperial dominance challenged, and labour unrest was building at home, that Bristol business leaders decided to raise a statue to the "wise and virtuous" Colston. In the US, the analogous efforts at shoring up existing power structures led to the establishment of the United Daughters of the Confederacy in 1894, followed in 1896 by the Sons of Confederate Veterans. Both groups worked tirelessly to raise monuments to white supremacists, Klansmen, and slaveholders all over the American South.

The two projects' simultaneity on opposite sides of the Atlantic was not a coincidence. They reflected an affiliated endeavour to promote ostensibly "Anglo-Saxon" values and leadership, one of remarkable longevity. One of the memorials that protestors have sought to remove this year is the bust of Nathan Bedford Forrest, a slave-trader, Confederate general and first Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, which sits in the Tennessee State Capitol. (Initially blocked by legislators in June, it is subject to further wrangling.) It was completed as late as 1978. These monuments do not symbolise "national" history or heritage: they symbolise the structures of white governance and power derived from the transatlantic slave trade.

Over the course of three centuries, more than 12.5m Africans were forcibly displaced across the Atlantic, as humans were exchanged for goods—textiles, tobacco, alcohol and guns—and then sold on as enslaved labour to produce more of the raw materials for trade, especially the sugar cane of the West Indies, and the cotton and tobacco of the American South. Although some argue that Britain led the way in "abolishing slavery," history is never that simple. Many 19th-century British leaders resisted abolition, and long after Britain had outlawed the transatlantic slave trade in 1807, it persisted in other British-held territories until 1833. Even after that, Britain continued to profit in a host of ways from the practice. ▶

Take the textile industry, which accounted for the livelihoods of almost 20 per cent of Britain's population and for 40 per cent of its exports in the early decades of the 19th century. Seventy-five per cent of its raw cotton was grown in the American South and harvested by slaves, keeping costs down. That's before discussing the conspicuous role of sugar cane in the 19th-century British economy. It was also out of the profits created by the slave trade that other—enduring—transatlantic industries grew, including transportation (shipping and railroads), as well as insurers, brokers and financiers who profited as middlemen.

“This kind of mystic nationalism always liberates itself from the tyranny of facts”

Around this trade system, there also circulated shared ideologies and stories that developed to make sense of, and justify, the imperial race-based marketplace. The two nations' political cultures had distinct identities, of course, and sharply differentiated histories, but they were divergent branches of some deeply shared roots. Sometimes the alliances were conscious and deliberate, as when Cecil Rhodes created his scholarships to undo what he saw as the pernicious effects of American independence, in an effort to reunite “Anglo-Saxons” in shared white supremacism. Others were much less so, as when British audiences gathered to watch *The Black and White Minstrel Show* from 1958 to 1978. It's impossible to know how many involved in producing or consuming the programme understood the work they were doing in furthering its fundamental message—that black people are sub-human figures of ridicule—or strengthening its transatlantic purchase. But that didn't stop this message from being absorbed.

There are important stories to be told, involving more complex transatlantic exchanges than the crude swapping of stories to reinforce white supremacism. Take the abolitionist Frederick Douglass, who travelled throughout the US and Britain in the 19th century arguing against the pernicious effects of slavery and white supremacism. He began life in bondage in Baltimore under the name Frederick Bailey, before escaping to New York and deciding, like many former slaves, to rename himself to claim a free identity. A friend suggested he take the hero's name—Douglas—from an immensely popular 1810 poem, *The Lady of the Lake* by Sir Walter Scott. He liked the sound of “the Black Douglass,” he later said, for its associations with “the free hills of old Scotland,” which had seen many a “fierce and bloody conflict between liberty and slavery.” And so Frederick Douglass stepped into history.

It is telling that Douglass had not even read Walter Scott before being shaped by his work. Scott's influence was so pervasive in 19th-century Britain and America as to have become ambient, part of a cultural atmosphere that Anglo-America still breathes to this day. *The Lady of the Lake*, a tale of Scottish clan leaders struggling for power against King James V, instantly inspired a London play of the same name, which transferred swiftly to America; by 1815 it had been performed in Philadelphia, New York, Boston, Baltimore and Washington DC. When Scottish folk hero Rhoderick Dhu appears, his clan sings a

martial anthem, “Hail to the Chief who in triumph advances!” and the song travelled around the country. At an 1815 celebration of the Peace of Ghent, ending the Anglo-American War of 1812 (a shared culture did not guarantee a smooth path from colonialism to independence), “Hail to the Chief” was played for the first time in honour of the American president. A tradition was born.

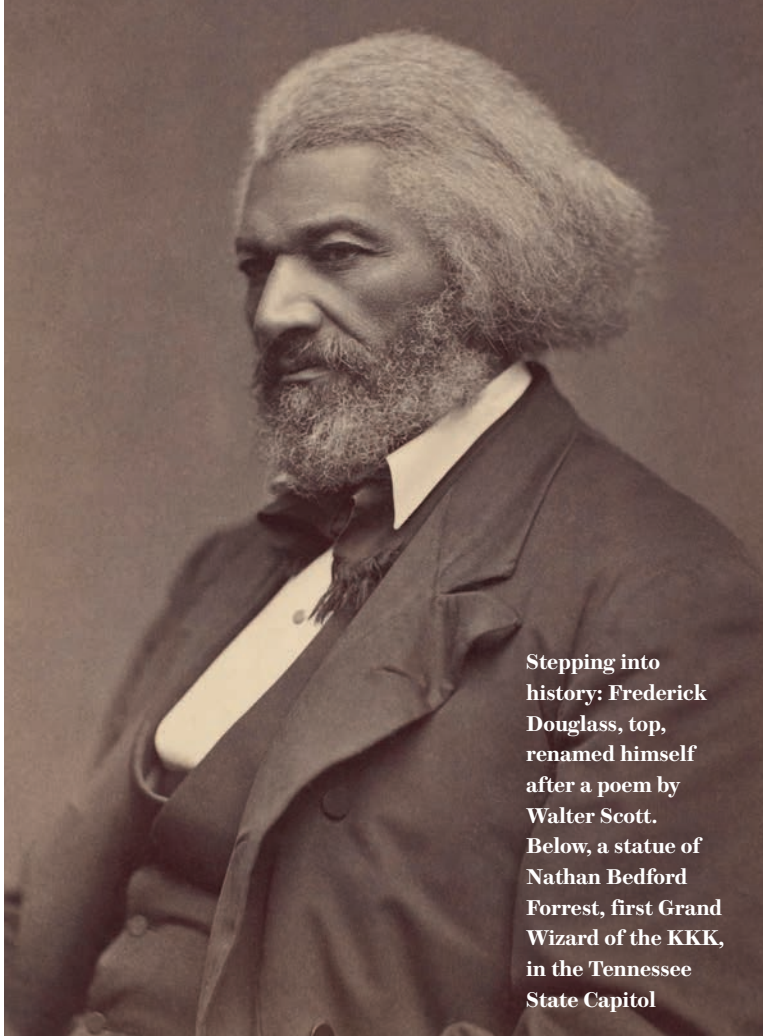
As well as inspiring a cult of the Highland clan, in poems like *Sir Tristrem* in 1804, *Marmion* in 1808, and *The Bridal of Triermain* in 1813, Scott also prompted an Arthurian revival. Three years later, Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* was published for the first time since 1634; Tennyson would soon follow with “The Lady of Shalott,” his own *Morte d'Arthur*, and the *Idylls of the King*, and the Pre-Raphaelites would start painting, reinforcing the Arthurian craze.

Then there was *Ivanhoe*. Set in 12th-century England, *Ivanhoe* is a historical romance about a Saxon knight whose personal loyalty to the Norman King Richard the Lionheart proves a catalyst for conflict. Scott explained that his novel was inspired by “the existence of two races in the same country,” by which he meant the “vanquished” Saxons (marked by “the free spirit infused by their ancient institutions and laws”) and the victorious Normans (“the flower of chivalry”). The book's 1819 publication, complete with obligatory allusions to King Arthur and the Round Table, was part of a wider medievalist revival that began with the vogue for Gothic, and soon led to a historically incoherent mélange of British archaisms, with chivalric knights, ladies fair, jousts, wizards, Saxons, Normans, squires, friars, cavaliers, troubadours, King Arthur, Highlanders, and the occasional Don Quixote all jostling in the cultural imagination. Out of the same impulse came the reimagining of the obscure fourth-century Greek Christian martyr St George, who was already England's patron saint, as a medieval knight and a national ideal of masculinity.

We can see medievalism's effect in the US in the appropriation of the word “minstrel” to describe itinerant white American performers in blackface. But even as these entertainers in the American South were singing about “Jim Crow,” a minstrel character who would eventually bestow his name upon segregationist laws, minstrelsy was travelling back to British music halls, where it lost most of its American baggage but retained the racism, becoming a popular fixture. The minstrel figure, like statues of white slavers, worked in the UK as a defence mechanism—bolstering a sense of white nationalism through the long decades when Britain's imperial hegemony was first newly rivalled, and then began to decline.

Scott's stories of different “races” jostling within one nation also supported the emerging theories of biological racial difference. Scott himself was not writing in defence of white supremacism per se, but rather drawing on archaic mythologies to navigate conflicting ideas about national identity. His popularity stemmed from his stories' ambivalent balance between nostalgia for heroic traditions and faith in progress, mapped onto tales of sectarian conflict. *Ivanhoe*, for example, was inspired by English historian Sharon Turner's popular *History of the Anglo-Saxons*, published between 1799 and 1805, which depicted the English as direct descendants of medieval Saxons.

That interest in the Saxons itself can be traced further back to the ideological debates in the 17th and 18th centuries over constitutional monarchism, which claimed from the distant past of Saxon England an “ancient constitution” of heritable liberty that was crushed in 1066 by the conquering “Norman yoke.” These legends travelled to the Americas with English colonists in the 17th century, and when the time for America's own insurrection



Stepping into history: Frederick Douglass, top, renamed himself after a poem by Walter Scott. Below, a statue of Nathan Bedford Forrest, first Grand Wizard of the KKK, in the Tennessee State Capitol



came, the myth of Saxon liberty offered a ready justification. The revolutionary generation in America saw themselves as legitimate heirs to the political traditions of free-born Saxons.

Thomas Jefferson was one of America's foremost Saxonists. Although he stopped halfway through *Ivanhoe* ("the dullest and driest reading" he had ever experienced), he traced the right of independence back to "our Saxon ancestors," proposing that Hengist and Horsa, the mythical founders of Saxon England, "from whom we claim the honor of being descended," should be engrained on the Great Seal of the United States. Jefferson fetishised the Anglo-Saxon language, saying it was "of peculiar value" to study as Americans would "imbibe" with it "their free principles of government." In other words, Americans' legal right to reject the authority of King George turned on their supposedly Saxon heritage. They tended not to dwell too much on the fact that the king was also, quite literally, "the Elector of Saxony"—this kind of mystic nationalism always liberates itself from the tyranny of facts.

These assertions of natural, heritable rights soon mutated into assertions of natural, heritable superiority. Those benefiting from those burgeoning modern forms of slavery, colonialism and imperialism felt increasingly impelled to justify their dominance. Over the course of the 19th century, scientific, historical, political and religious arguments were produced to explain the "natural" supremacy of Anglo-Saxons, laying the foundations for British imperialism, as well as American exceptionalism including in its expansionist form of manifest destiny. The argument began to mutate, no longer claiming rights on the basis of a shared tradition, but rather on tribal bloodlines. Thus in 1836 a Vermont newspaper told its readers: "To our precious Saxon blood, we are indebted, it seems, for our laws, our liberty, our intelligence and our civilization: not to the 'wisdom of our ancestors,'... [but] to our blood; that is to our family descent." The argument flatly repudiates that rights are derived from political tradition, claiming instead, quite explicitly, that they are a matter of biological entitlement.

The "natural" freedom of Anglo-Saxons in the American North also defended, quite easily, chattel slavery in the American South. A Virginia newspaper argued in the same year: "It is peculiar to the character of this Anglo-Saxon race of men to which we belong, that it has never been contented to live in the same country with any other distinct race, upon terms of equality; it has, invariably, when placed in that situation, proceeded to exterminate or enslave the other race in some form or other, or, failing in that, to abandon the country." In other words, don't blame us for slavery and genocide, we're just Anglo-Saxon.

What first the historical and then the biological theories did was to *invent* the category of the "modern Anglo-Saxon." White Americans did not, initially, identify themselves as Anglo-Saxons at all; the idea of the "White Anglo-Saxon Protestant" or WASP had no purchase. Of course "white Protestants" were everywhere—and always in charge—but the idea that ►

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Anglo-Saxonism, as a racial identity, had anything to do with it had to first emerge and then evolve to justify the existing realities of power.

White supremacy was always the implicit premise of Anglo-Saxonism, and the tide of history soon allowed its advocates to make this increasingly explicit. Britons like Thomas Carlyle and then Francis Galton and Cecil Rhodes argued that the success of Anglo-Saxon imperialism proved their inherent superiority and rights to empire; white Americans looked at enslaved or subjugated black people or decimated native tribes and concluded they deserved their devastation.

The power of these ideas extended beyond the “colour line.” They began to gain purchase just as large waves of new immigrants from western Europe arrived in the US in the mid-19th century, giving rise to a new movement called “nativism,” which argued that the bloodlines of this new immigrant stock, including the Irish and (notwithstanding the geography of Saxony) the Germans, were inferior to the glorious Anglo-Saxon heritage of the “native” English settlers. There was also racial violence against Mexicans: from the mid-19th century on, nearly 600 of them died at the hands of American lynch mobs. (Trump has this summer spun out imaginary scenarios in which “a very tough hombre is breaking into the window of a young woman whose husband is away”; a “tough hombre” is none-too-subtle code for a Mexican.) These immigrants, too, would deserve what happened to them.

Sir Walter Scott’s romances fell into the fertile soil of this broad set of ideas about tribal identity. Again and again, Scott returns to the theme of divided loyalties: his heroes have to navigate the equally valid claims of competing factions, while being buffeted by large historical events, and—somehow—not just survive, but emerge with a viable sense of identity. His writings became a national mania in a United States still trying to decide who it was and find a usable past. American towns changed their names to *Ivanhoe* and *Waverley*, while a vogue for jousting tournaments, which had started on English aristocratic estates, took America by storm—with knights-errant, gentle ladies and wandering troubadours. As late as 1870, Brooklyn’s Prospect Park hosted a “Grand Tournament” of “doughty Knights.”

But it was the antebellum South that was most captivated by Scott’s mythologies: gentlemen mounted on armoured horses to tilt, joust and show off their fake heraldry. There were fashions for velvet tunics, ornate caps, and affected titles such as the “Knight of the Golden Lance,” while the fetishisation of aristocratic notions of “gentility” took hold. In 1854, a newspaper in Richmond, Virginia praised a tournament of “jousting in honor of their ladies and performing many a deed of derring-do” for bringing “civilised, refined and chivalrous” ideals to the “barbarous regions of West Virginia.”

This was something more than playacting, however. These tropes became an active part of how the Confederate South defined itself against the North:



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the inherent violence of its system was romanticised into a noble chivalric way of life. *Ivanhoe*’s “two races,” coexisting in an uneasy truce, chimed with Americans who felt that the divide between North and South was growing unbridgeable. In absorbing Scott and other medievalist mythologies, Americans began to trace an Anglo-Saxon history back through the English Civil War, so that New England settlers in the North became Puritan-Saxons and Southerners became Cavalier-Normans. Indeed, white Southerners before the Civil War described themselves as Anglo-Norman more often than as Anglo-Saxon.

The South’s pastoral nostalgia was set in conscious opposition to the industrialised modernity of the North. And the aggressive feudalism of the pageants recast black slaves as loyal serfs, bound by devotion to the land and the family they served. At the same time, it reinforced the cult of Southern white womanhood, their purity defended by gallant plantation aristocrats. An ascendant Southern nationalism absorbed this self-serving mythical genealogy and defended race-based slavery as a venerable tradition, with the plantation as merely its latest incarnation.

The cult of medievalism also locked the South into a defiant backwardness. Scott was so central to its identity that Mark Twain, who grew up in the slave state of Missouri during the 1840s, later railed against what he called “the Sir Walter disease.” The author

Modern myth-making: Bristol’s statue of Edward Colston was erected in 1895, almost 200 years after his death and pulled down in June

had, Twain insisted, done “more real and lasting harm, perhaps, than any other individual that ever wrote.” In fact, “Sir Walter had so large a hand in making Southern character, as it existed before the war, that he is in great measure responsible for the war.”

Scott’s stories were equally responsible for shaping the region’s bitter response to defeat. In *The Lady of the Lake* Rhoderick Dhu lights a cross to signal an uprising against the king, as Scott invokes an ancient Scottish custom for gathering the clans, known as the *Crean Tarigh*, or Fiery Cross. The image of a clansman burning a fiery cross as a call to arms against a tyrannical sovereign authority was revived in 1866, just after the Civil War ended, by a ragtag white supremacist group in Tennessee.

“If communicating our history were really the motive of those who raised statues, they wouldn’t have chosen such an uncommunicative form”

As the Confederate South continued to seethe against the “War of Northern Aggression,” and the (de jure, if not always de facto) emancipation of the slaves, the old romantic idea of a local “white knight” defending the Southern way of life, and especially white Southern womanhood, took a vicious turn as paramilitary groups with quasi-medieval names like the Knights of the White Camellia sprang up. The Ku Klux Klan—“an institution of chivalry,” its founders declared—derived its name from the Greek for circle (*kuklos*) and Sir Walter Scott’s clans. The “clan” was formed of “knights” and “wizards” rather than the more obvious chieftains or warriors, and burned fiery crosses in acts of vigilante violence it preferred to regard as rebellion against a tyrannical federal government. Its occultism was partly an intimidation tactic; the first Klan also designated various members “Ghouls,” “Hydras,” “Cyclops” and so on. But the “Knights of the Ku Klux Klan” were also an outgrowth from decades of the Sir Walter Disease. Beyond the imagery, Scott endowed the postbellum South with its animating myth of the Lost Cause, and the nobility of remaining loyal to a defeated ideal, and *Ivanhoe* became its code. (In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, set in Alabama during the 1930s, Jem Finch destroys the flowers of racist old Mrs Dubose and his punishment is to have to read *Ivanhoe* aloud to her.)

The first Klan was only a scattering of murderous groups that lasted about five years, and was seen off by federal forces in the early 1870s. But its mythology endured. In 1905, Thomas Dixon, Jr published *The Clansman*, a wildly popular genesis myth for the first Klan that draws on Scott: his Southerners have the “blood of Scottish kings” flowing through their veins, and invoke “the old Scottish rite of the Fiery Cross” to “send a thrill of inspiration to every clansman in the hills.” In reality, the only thing medieval about the historical Klan was its brutal violence, but Dixon’s novels were hugely successful in reinforcing the white South’s fantasies of nobility—and in so doing helped spread an idealised version of white masculinity across America.

The Clansman, in turn, inspired *The Birth of a Nation*, DW Griffith’s hugely successful cinematic paean to the Lost Cause

in 1915. (Griffith was the son of a Confederate colonel.) Griffith said he hoped the film would “create a feeling of abhorrence in white people, especially white women, against colored men.” That it did. Six months after its release, a young Jewish man named Leo Frank, who had been convicted, probably wrongfully, of murdering 13-year-old Mary Phagan, was taken from an Atlanta jail and lynched. That Thanksgiving, 16 men gathered on the summit of nearby Stone Mountain, lit a fiery cross, and declared the Klan reborn.

The second Klan started small, but intense national media coverage gave this fringe band of vigilantes publicity they could never have afforded. Klan membership skyrocketed, as did discussion around the “white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant” identity it purported to defend. Soon the Klan achieved its greatest influence—not in the old South, but in the nativist heartland of the Midwest, where Anglo-Saxonism also exerted a tremendous pull. In 1923 an Indiana newspaper argued in highly typical terms that Klansmen were “not going to stand by and see the country overrun by a set of people from foreign countries,” or to have “their children inter-marry with those of other races than the Anglo-Saxon race, which has gone down in history as the most progressive and the most civilised of all races.” The Klan, the article added, would ensure “that soon a flag would float from every school-house and a Bible would be on every school desk,” because the Klan, he said, stood for “America first”—the very slogan that, in the 21st century, Trump would make his own. A mythical identity had willed itself into existence, one that continues to shape American—and world—history to this day.

The nostalgic feudalism of Lost Cause mythologies permeates the 1939 film *Gone with the Wind*. The film—based on Margaret Mitchell’s 1936 novel, which was itself partly inspired by her love of the writings of Thomas Dixon, Jr—opens with a paean to a “land of Cavaliers and Cotton Fields called the Old South. Here in this pretty world, Gallantry took its last bow. Here was the last ever to be seen of Knights and their Ladies Fair, of Master and of Slave.” This spring, HBO temporarily removed the film from its catalogue, intending to return it once it had been framed with historical context. A tiresomely predictable outcry against censorship followed.

All of these mythologies, whether they produced a minstrel show, a statue, or murderous groups like the Ku Klux Klan, were productions of nostalgia, not history. Nostalgia is driven not by knowledge of the past, but by desires in the present, and therefore is always anachronistic, an act of cultural projection.

Today, as people around the world insist that we look afresh at our tangled histories, a handful of white male leaders respond by doubling down on the old stories. But whether it is Trump tweeting about forts he’d never heard of until they were about to be renamed or Boris Johnson warning that the removal of statues of white supremacists would be telling a “lie about our history,” they are confusing history with mythology.

The removal of these statues is an attempt to advance closer to the truth, in part by moving beyond monolithic symbols that choose glorification over the difficult work of history. If communicating our history were really the motive of those who raised statues, they wouldn’t have chosen such an uncommunicative form of ancestor worship. One might even call it primitive. **P**

Sarah Churchwell is the author of *Behold, America: A History of America First and the American Dream* (Bloomsbury)



In place of hope

All identity politics is a dead end.
But the politics of white identity
is a dangerous dead end

KENAN MALIK

“**W**hite Lives Matter Burnley!” ran the banner trailed by a plane above the Etihad stadium, Manchester City’s ground, during a match with Burnley in June. Since the Premier League resumed after the coronavirus hiatus, players and officials have “taken the knee” at the start of matches in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement against racism and police brutality.

The stunt was roundly condemned by almost everyone: Burnley captain Ben Mee, football administrators, and most people in the Lancashire town, black, Asian and white. Yet if the banner drew near-universal opprobrium, implicit in the slogan were several themes that resonate more widely today—the claim that the needs of white people are being ignored, the notion of white victimhood and the growing significance of “white identity.”

Even a decade ago, discussions of “white identity” belonged to the fringes of politics. It was Nazi-speak. Today it has become a significant political issue on both sides of the Atlantic. In Britain, the debate about the so-called “left behind” has focused mainly on the travails of the “white working class.” Many commentators bemoan the way that traditional working-class culture and heritage has been eroded by mass migration. There has been growing interest in the problems facing certain poor towns, many of which remain overwhelmingly white. Figures showing falling life

expectancy in the most deprived areas of Britain have prompted fears of the UK following the US. There, economists Anne Case and Angus Deaton have documented a shocking drop in longevity caused by “deaths of despair”—people dying from suicide, alcoholism and drug overdoses—specifically among less-educated whites. The poor performance of working-class white boys in schools has added to the sense of “white neglect.” Last year, educationalist and philanthropist Bryan Thwaites offered two private schools a £1m donation to provide scholarships for disadvantaged white working-class boys. When the schools turned it down, Trevor Phillips, former head of the Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), said the refusal showed “the liberal guilt of a largely brahmin caste” standing in the way of someone who “wanted to do the right thing by families who need support.”

In the US, a new genre of books about the lives of poor whites has emerged, the most celebrated of which is JD Vance’s *Hill-billy Elegy*. There are also serious accounts of the way that poverty among white communities has long been ignored, such as historian Nancy Isenberg’s *White Trash: The 400-Year Untold History of Class in America*. American polls show that almost half of white workers feel like “strangers in their own land,” while a third believe that not enough is being done to “preserve its white European heritage.” Meanwhile, Donald Trump heightens “white consciousness” by drawing on the deep-seated tropes that Sarah Churchill elucidates on p34. The British-based Canadian political scientist Eric Kaufmann has stirred controversy—but also found a sympathetic hearing across the political spectrum, including from the *Spectator*’s Douglas Murray to *Prospect*’s founder David Goodhart—by arguing that whites should be able to assert their “racial self-interest” like any other ethnic group.

Lurking in the background of this debate are myriad interlinked developments: the erosion of the power and standing of the working class; the blurring of the old divisions between left and right; the creation of a new fault line separating the winners from the losers of globalisation; and the rise of populism and the emergence of anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim movements. Most of these issues have been dissected at length. Less attention has been paid, though, to the nature of white identity itself, and to its historical roots. Identity politics is usually viewed as a politics of the left, and white identity seen as a latecomer to the scene—an attempt to replicate the success of minority groups. A longer view reveals the opposite to be the case: that progressive forms of identity politics were the ones late on the scene, and that

the origins of the politics of identity lie not on the left but on the reactionary right.

Before discussing this history, we need first to distinguish between *identity* and the *politics of identity*. Identities are of great significance for our sense of ourselves, our grounding in the world and our relationships to others. Politics, though, is a means, or *should* be a means, of taking us beyond the narrow sense of identity given to each of us by circumstance and personal experience. As a teenager, I was drawn to politics because of my experience of racism; but if it was racism that drew me to politics, it was politics that made me see beyond the narrow confines of race. I came to see there was more to social justice than challenging the injustices done to me. I discovered the writings of Marx and Mill, of James Baldwin and Hannah Arendt, of CLR James and Frantz Fanon. Most of all, I discovered that I could find more solidarity with those whose ethnicity or culture was different to mine, but who shared my values, than with those with whom I shared an ethnicity or culture but not the same political vision. Politics was not shackled to my identity, but helped me to reach beyond it.

Today, though, far from taking us beyond our narrow identities, politics is increasingly constrained by them. What we are defines what we should cherish or value or believe. Many imagine that to be Muslim or gay or European is to accept a particular package of ideals. The story of contemporary white identity becomes one more thread in the broader story of how politics came to be circumscribed in this fashion.

The original practice of “identity politics” emerged well before it acquired its modern name. Its roots go back to the late 18th and early 19th century, its fullest expression being in the notion of race—the idea that humans could be divided into a number of distinct groups or races, each defined by distinctive biological, social and moral characteristics. The germ of this idea can be seen in the 18th-century writings of Enlightenment thinkers such as Hume, Kant and Jefferson. It only matured, however, in the 19th century, against the background of disenchantment with—and hostility to—Enlightenment ideas of universalism and equality.

Today, we think of races as defined primarily by skin colour, or continent of origin. In the 19th century, “races” were distinguished by class as much as by colour. It may be difficult to comprehend now, but 19th-century thinkers saw the working class as a racially distinct group in much the same way as many now view black people as being racially distinct from whites. As an 1864 vignette of working-class life in the weekly newspaper *Saturday Review* put it, “the distinctions and separations... of English classes... offer a very fair parallel to the separation of the slaves from the whites.” We might look upon Victorian society as largely mono-racial but that’s not how Victorians themselves saw it. The meanings of both “race” and “whiteness” were significantly different from what they are now.

In 1865, there was a banquet in Southampton in honour of Edward John Eyre, the governor of Jamaica.

That year, Eyre had put down an uprising on the island with ferocity. The Jamaica Committee, set up by liberals and radicals to prosecute Eyre for his actions, organised a counter-rally to the banquet. On the protest, the *Daily Telegraph* reported, “There are a good many negroes in Southampton who have the taste of their tribe for any disturbance that appears safe.” In fact, as historian Douglas Lorimer observes in his book *Colour, Class and the Victorians*, “the *Daily Telegraph*’s ‘negroes’ were... the very English and very white Southampton mob who thronged the streets outside the banquet hall.”

“If it was racism that drew me to politics, it was politics that made me see beyond the narrow confines of race”

The Southampton incident reveals the 19th-century elite view of black people and white workers as being part of the same “tribe.” This was not simply an English phenomenon. The French Christian socialist Philippe Buchez, in a talk to the Medico-Psychological Society of Paris in 1857, wondered how it could be that “within a population such as ours, races may form—not merely one but several races—so miserable, inferior and bastardised that they may be classed below the most inferior savage races, for their inferiority is sometimes beyond cure.” The “races” that so troubled Buchez were not from Africa or Asia, but constituted the working class and the rural poor.

Today, “white identity” is discussed largely in the context of the working class. But, historically, the working class was seen as “savage” and as inferior as any non-white race. Whiteness in the contemporary sense began to emerge only at the turn of the 20th century, propelled by two developments: the coming of democracy and a new imperialism, exemplified by the “scramble for Africa.”

As western nations became more democratic with the eventual extension of suffrage to the whole adult population, so the racial view of the working class, which had dominated 19th-century elite consciousness, slowly faded from public view. The widening of suffrage coincided with the expansion of imperial rule in a frenzy of land-grabbing by European nations from Africa to the Pacific. In the coincidence of democracy and imperialism, support for imperialism became “democratised.” Racial thinking evolved from an elite ideology to become part of patriotic popular culture. The racial superiority of the British people was celebrated in mass circulation newspapers, penny-dreadful novels and popular entertainment.

The language of race became, as a consequence, refocused more exclusively on skin colour. The “colour line” developed into the chief way of understanding ►

Once the preserve of a far-right underground, “white identity” was recently asserted in the sky above Manchester City’s ground (left)

and dividing the world. From America's 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, to the "White Australia" policy to Britain's Aliens Act of 1905, designed primarily to prevent east European Jews from entering the country, immigration laws became means of institutionalising racial difference and identity. It was important, the American historian and journalist Lothrop Stoddard wrote in *The Rising Tide of Color: The Threat Against White World-Supremacy* (1920), that "the rising tide of color finds itself walled in by white dikes."

Where racial supremacists of both left and right viewed the world through the lens of racial identity, radicals challenging inequality and oppression did so in the name of universal rights. They insisted that there existed a set of values and institutions under which *all* humans could best flourish. It was the same universalism that would fuel the great movements of emancipation, from anti-colonial struggles to the campaigns for women's suffrage. All were struggles against the politics of defining people by their identity.

"The recognition of identity became not a means to an end, but an end in itself"

But imperialism and racial thinking posed difficult questions. If Europe had been responsible for the enslavement of more than half the world, many asked, what worth could there be in its political and moral ideals, which at best had failed to prevent that enslavement, at worst had provided its intellectual grounding?

Over time, opposition to European rule became associated with opposition to European ideas, too. Universalism came to be seen as Eurocentric, even racist, because it sought to impose Euro-American ideas of rationality and objectivity on other peoples. The ideals that flowed out of the Enlightenment, many argued, grew out of a particular culture and history. Non-Europeans had to develop ideas and values rooted in their own cultures and needs. The result was first, the flourishing of a host of 20th-century separatist movements, such as Garveyism, pan-Africanism, black nationalism and negritude, and then—eventually—the emergence of radical identity politics in the decades following the Second World War.

In the wake of Nazism and the Holocaust, and amid struggles for independence across Africa, Asia and the Caribbean, the relationship between left, right and the politics of identity changed. Racism did not disappear. But where ideas of racial superiority had been, in the pre-war world, the norm within western elite circles, racial equality now enjoyed the moral high ground.

At the same time, the radical rejection of universalism in favour of particularist claims took new political forms. The struggle for black rights in the US fostered fresh ideas about identity and self-organisation. Squeezed between an intensely racist society on the one hand, and an often-indifferent left on the other,

many black activists in the 1960s ceded from integrated civil rights organisations and set up separate groups, giving rise to the Black Power and Black Panther movements.

Many began to argue that African Americans had to organise separately not just as a political strategy but also as a cultural necessity. "Negritude," the activist Julius Lester wrote, "is the recognition of those things uniquely ours which separate ourselves from the white man." Black radicalism provided a template for many other groups, from women to Native Americans, from Muslims to gays, to look upon social change through the lens of their own cultures, goals and ideals.

The term "identity politics" was coined in 1977 by a black lesbian organisation called the American Combahee River Collective, which argued that the most radical politics came from people placing their own experiences at the centre of their struggles. Nevertheless, they insisted, too, that such struggles were necessarily interwoven with broader campaigns for change. Identity politics of that time provided a means of challenging oppression as a specific part of a wider project of social transformation.

Over the past half-century, that wider social project has disintegrated. Trade unions, the old left and the "new" social movements have all withered. The recognition of identity became not a means to an end, but an end in itself. Values and beliefs were reimagined as something that, at least partly, consisted in *being* black or gay or Muslim.

An important distinction historically has been that between the inward-looking "binding" politics of identity, and the outward-looking "bridging" politics of solidarity. The former mobilises by emphasising shared membership of a particular identity, be that gender, sexuality, race or nation. The politics of solidarity also stresses collective endeavour, but views commonality as emerging not from particular identities but out of a shared set of values and beliefs, and the struggles to win acceptance for those values and beliefs. The distinction is not always clear cut—elements of both co-exist in many forms of collective politics. But where the politics of identity divides, the politics of solidarity establishes common purpose across fissures of race, gender, sexuality, religion and nation. It is, however, the politics of solidarity that has crumbled over the past three decades as radical movements have declined. For many today, the only form of collective politics that seems possible is that rooted in identity.

"Solidarity" has become increasingly defined not in political terms—as collective action in pursuit of certain ideals—but in terms of ethnicity or culture. The question people ask themselves is not so much: "What kind of society do I want?" as "Who are we?" The two questions are, of course, intimately related, and any sense of social identity must embed an answer to both. But as the political sphere has narrowed, and as mechanisms for political change have eroded, so the answer to the question "What kind of society do I want?" has become less about values and institutions than about the kind of people they imagine they are. And the ►

Earlier forms of white identity politics (below) combined with the left's indifference gave rise to separatist minority movements such as the Black Panthers (above)



Keep Australia White

Mr. Heitmann, Nationalist Member for Kalgoorlie, and a son of a German, speaking at Wedderburn during the Grampians by-election, stated

"Send every man out of Australia, even if they had to import black, brown or brindle labor to do their work."



answer to “Who are we?” has become defined less by “progressive” aspirations for the society we want to see tomorrow, than by the history and heritage to which supposedly we belong.

Notions of white identity did not disappear in the postwar period, any more than racism did. But they were submergered and marginalised, and when they did express themselves—as in Southern opposition to the civil rights movement in America or through Powellism in Britain—the mainstream, to a greater or lesser extent, condemned them as racist.

By the 1970s, it was only on the far-right fringes that the notion still had purchase. Rather than simply defend discredited ideas of biological superiority, however, some far-right thinkers began also appropriating cultural arguments, and ideas about difference, to generate new racist notions of identity.

“The notion of ‘white identity’ obscures the real reasons for the precariousness of working-class lives”

The French philosopher Alain de Benoist, one of the founders of the Nouvelle Droite movement in the 1970s, and someone with a complex and ambiguous relationship to the far right, used the concept of *droit à la différence* (“the right to difference”) to defend French national culture from being “swamped” by immigrants. The mixing of cultures, he argued, would damage the cultural identity of both host and minority communities. “Will the Earth be reduced to something homogenous because of the deculturalising and depersonalising trends for which American imperialism is now the most cynical and arrogant rector?” he asked. “Or will people find the means for the necessary resistance in their beliefs, traditions, and ways of seeing the world?” Here was an early instance of the radical argument for pluralism appropriated for reactionary ends. It has since come to shape the thinking of radical right groups on both sides of the Atlantic. Former Trump aide Steve Bannon, for instance, has long expressed his admiration for Benoist-type identitarian politics.

The same trends that transformed the 1960s social movements into the insular contemporary politics of identity have also driven the rehabilitation of white identity. Central to this story are the sinking fortunes of the working class. Throughout Europe, economic and social changes—the decline of manufacturing industry, a squeezed welfare state, more atomised societies, the rise of the gig economy—have all bred insecurity. Political shifts, including the growing gulf between increasingly metropolitan social democratic parties and their old working-class voters, have left many feeling politically voiceless at the same time as their lives have become more precarious. Where once there were institutions to foster solidarity, dignity and indeed identity, what’s left today is anger and disaffection. It is against this setting that falling life expectancy in the most deprived communities, or the educational failures of white working-class boys, is generating such anguish.

The marginalisation of the working class is, at root, the product of economic, social and political changes. But many have come to feel it as a *cultural* loss. When the working class was central to British politics, it was easy to see how issues of housing or wages related to economic and social policy. Today, the only

time “class politics” seems to be discussed is to highlight not the material roots of social problems, but the gap between elite and working-class norms. As culture becomes the lens through which social issues are refracted, many within the working class turn to the idiom of identity to express their discontent. And as the language of politics and class has given way to the language of culture and identity, so class has come to be seen not so much a political or economic as a cultural, even racial, attribute.

Sociologists and journalists often talk today about the white working class but rarely about the black working class or the Muslim working class. Black people and Muslims are regarded as belonging to almost classless communities. The working class has come to be seen primarily as white, and white has become a seemingly mandatory adjective through which to define the working class. It is a perspective that denies both the long history of black and Asian involvement in the working class, and the present-day economic role that minorities play—a role whose importance the “essential workers” of the pandemic has underscored.

Meanwhile, radical right movements have helped reshape politics by linking a bigoted form of identity politics, rooted in hostility to migrants and Muslims, to economic and social policies that were once the staple of the left: defence of jobs, support for the welfare state, opposition to austerity. The result has been the refashioning of the reactionary politics of identity for a new age.

Some commentators argue that not taking seriously the desire for white people to assert their identity will open the door to the far right. The opposite is true. By suggesting that the white population should have the right to reduce the inflow of non-whites into a country, or that it is a social problem if whites become a minority in a city like London, mainstream commentators echo the assertions of the far right and legitimise racist claims such as the “Great Replacement” theory, the belief that whites are being driven out of their “homelands.” The normalisation of “white identity” allows racism to rebrand itself.

It is true that politicians have long neglected working-class grievances, and that issues such as “deaths of despair” or the poor educational attainments of white working-class boys have not received the attention they should have. The “white lives matter” claims are driven not just by bigotry, though clearly there is a large element of that, but also by anger over such neglect.

Working-class grievances cannot, however, be understood in terms of “whiteness.” There is no singular set of “white” interests. Those responsible for the marginalisation of the working class are also largely white—politicians, bureaucrats, bankers, company bosses. The problems facing white workers are similar to many of those facing non-white workers. The notion of “white identity” obscures the real reasons for the precariousness of working-class lives and so makes it more difficult to tackle them.

The challenge is to address the problems facing working-class communities in terms other than that of identity. The politics of identity, whether radical or reactionary, encourages people to repose their grievances into forms that make them less resolvable. Rather than ask “What are the policy reasons for falling life expectancy or the poor education achievements of white working-class boys?” people are pushed into blaming migrants or Muslims or black people, and into retreating into a narrow, racial identity. If we are honest about improving working-class lives, we need to confront, not promote, ideas of white identity. **P**

Kenan Malik’s *“The Quest for a Moral Compass: A Global History of Ethics”* is out with Atlantic



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THE
HISTORY
WARS

The politics of atonement

The crimes of every nation are different.
So too must be the way it makes up for them

IVAN KRASTEV AND LEONARD BENARDO

What is the ideal approach for a nation confronting its historical crimes? In dealing with historical guilt, are nations better off working to become “normal,” or should they strive to be “exceptional”?

In Britain, historians attempting to critique the legacy of the empire or its role in slavery—as opposed to its abolition—have set off furious debates, which in recent weeks have poured onto the streets. Some statues may have fallen, but there has been a backlash too, and whether or not any deep mark on the country’s sense of itself will endure is far from clear. For those hoping to inspire lasting change and sustained atonement, it is important to ask what has and hasn’t worked elsewhere in the world.

The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which tried to account for apartheid, may have been an exceptional case and not one with universal applicability as some human rights activists would like to believe. Similarly, the German model for contending with its Nazi past has failed to be replicated, most notoriously in Russia in regard to its Stalinist history, because of the very exceptionalism inherent to it.

But is there a way out of this impasse? We will argue that the only way to make peace with a bloody history is through exceptionalism—reckoning with what is exceptional in your own country's story, and finding, too, a distinct and homegrown way to face up to the truth and its consequences. Those consequences, and their lessons, will after all be different for different peoples.

The work of Susan Neiman is instructive in this respect. Neiman is a philosopher, an American citizen, a Jewish woman, and a committed leftist who has spent the last 35 years living in Berlin trying to make sense of the moral dilemmas of her city. In her 2019 book, *Learning from the Germans*, Neiman invokes Tzvetan Todorov's insistence that only the Germans—the perpetrators—should talk about the singularity of the Holocaust. By contrast, Jews—as the victims—should be focused on its universality.

Original sins

With this moral map as her guide, Neiman returns to her native Mississippi to ask why an America that twice elected Barack Obama can't arrive at a consensus around the legacy of slavery and the continued discrimination against African Americans. Is it not time, Neiman wonders, for Americans to do what the Germans pulled off decades ago—to “work off their past” (in German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, a key concept for her)—to speak forthrightly about the country's racial inequalities, and finally do something to compensate the victims?

Other American progressives agree. The writer Tanehi Coates gained widespread attention for his stirring 2014 article in the *Atlantic* demanding financial reparations for black Americans. Coates made the argument that such reparations are about slavery, but not only slavery. Centuries of racial terror and billions of dollars of economic theft from African Americans in the time since abolition also, in his view, require compensation. The power of his argument led to a hearing in the House of Representatives last June, where Coates himself testified in support of a bill to begin a study into this complex question.

Also last summer, a daring work of historical re-envisioning became the subject of public debate. The *New York Times*' 1619 Project—named for the date when the first slave ship of 20 Africans from what is now Angola came to the new world, landing in Jamestown, Virginia—sought to move back the starting point of American history by over a century. The horrors of slavery, rather than the liberal pieties of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, were positioned at the centre of the American experience.

The gambits of both Coates and Nikole Hannah-Jones, the progenitor of the 1619 project who was recently awarded a Pulitzer Prize, are similar: to ensure that the tragic history of African Americans in the US would not be made comparable to any other. In short, it was an effort to “exceptionalise” the American experience: to make clear that the social, political and cultural dimensions of African American history were distinct, the scale of the prolonged crime unique. By proceeding

in this fashion, US history might be made credible and convincing to those who suffered from its ravages.

In an ironic twist, their efforts echo the 19th-century description of slavery as a “peculiar institution.” In this earlier effort to make American history exceptional, although in this context it meant exceptionally blameless, the modifier “peculiar” was used to soften the travesty of slavery—contrasting it favourably with other forms of earlier human bondage. The term, coined by southern slave-owners, was meant to imply that the US was more benevolent and paternalistic in its treatment of those in bondage. Subject to criticism by American historians starting from the 1950s, the term had previously been the dominant frame by which a southern consensus on slavery's ignominious past was justified. American slavery, for these critics, was no better than any other kind. Modern activists, by contrast, think of it as much worse—a shorthand for the depths to which mankind can sink.

From downfall to redemption

Neiman's book came as a result of her Berlin-Mississippi intellectual journey. Part memoir, part historical inquiry, part philosophical investigation, it is a book of “comparative redemption.” It focuses on what has happened in German history since the Second World War, and what has failed to change in the American South since the Civil War.

Neiman is not an uncritical admirer of the German approach. In the 1950s, West Germans were silent about their participation in the crimes of the Nazi regime, and were instead absorbed by the idea that they were the real victims. Not only had they to survive among the ruins, they believed, they also had to live with the humiliation of defeat. Neiman argues that the Allies' attempt to de-Nazify Germany after the war was both insincere and ineffective. For Neiman, “working off the past is not something that can be imposed from without.” In her eyes, German success in facing its past is rooted in the revolt of the generation of 1968—that cohort compelled by history and fate to ask their parents questions about what precisely they did during the war.

And ask they did. The '68 generation brought the conversation into the public sphere, demanding the terrible details. This struggle was ferocious but necessary, and enabled Germany to properly reckon with its past. The concept of *Sonderweg* or “special path,” which German historians had once deployed to describe a uniquely German trajectory from Bismarck to Hitler, can be also seen in the country's approach towards grappling with the Nazi era. Only through its own distinct experience and approach—its *Sonderweg*—could a workable path to a new consensual perspective be reached. Making it a crime to deny the Holocaust, as the Germans have done, could never have been legitimately and credibly imposed from outside.

Reflecting on the opportunities and risks of adopting the German approach, we have struggled with why Germany's lessons have not worked particularly well in central and eastern Europe. Most concretely, why has the ►

Finding redemption from within: German Chancellor Willy Brandt kneels in front of a war memorial in the former Jewish ghetto of Warsaw in 1970

west's external pressure on Russia to confront its Stalinist past in the same fashion as Germany failed so spectacularly? The answer is worth dwelling on.

Russia today

Today the majority of Russians—including younger Russians who we might have expected to demand answers to the thorniest historical questions—assess Stalin in a positive light. As we witness toppled statues in Europe and the US, in Russia the state has sanctioned the erection of busts of Stalin in various cities including the country's third largest, Novosibirsk.

In 2019 the most respected pollster in Russia, the Levada Center, found that these efforts are working, with 70 per cent of Russians believing that Stalin's rule had been good for the Soviet Union. In fact, the number who admired Stalin was greater than at any point since Levada started polling on the question in 2001. Lev Gudkov, the head of the Levada Centre, stated that "there's been a quiet rehabilitation of Stalin on the part of the government."

The director of Moscow's Gulag Museum, Roman Romanov, claims, or rather hopes, this attitude is about using Stalin as a way to fulfil something missing in people's lives—and that such admiration will fade with the older generation. But giving the rising tide of support for the dictator, this seems unlikely, and we must ask how truth and atonement went into reverse. Can it be chalked up to simple false consciousness or historical ignorance? In an age when many young Americans and British leftists, concerned with slavery and empire, are eager to learn from the German experience, what can we instead learn from Russia's failure to deal with its past? Why has revisionism failed in Russia and indeed large swaths of central and eastern Europe?

First, and most obviously, while Nazi rule lasted a dozen years, Soviet rule in Russia lasted some seven decades. Nazi Germany experienced a humiliating military defeat, while the Soviets eventually won the "great patriotic war" during which, for all its agonies, no foreign army ever marched on Moscow. Post-war Germany was stewarded by leaders who sought a decisive break with National Socialism, whereas Khrushchev sought a break from Stalin but never really from his system, and Russia is today run by a former colonel of the secret police.

Germany's post-war economic achievements eventually allowed its citizens to face their collective guilt in a more confident, rather than a defensive spirit, with contemporary success encouraging hope that society could continue to recover and prosper into the future after drawing a line under past crimes.

The rocky and, for a time, ruinous road of the Russian economy after the Soviet collapse stands in stark contrast. Yet there is something more fundamental in Russia's failed replication of the German model in the post-Cold War world. The historian Carlo Ginzburg was on to something when he suggested that "the country one belongs to is not, as the usual rhetoric goes, the one you love but the one you are ashamed of." We rarely experience our national belonging as powerfully as in those moments when we feel "ashamed for somebody different from us for something we are not involved in," but for someone whom we nonetheless feel a sense of responsibility.

One's homeland is a place from which you cannot morally escape. You can emigrate, sure, but that sense of shame will always catch you up. This shame may grow out of a powerful sense of belonging, but whether it is the right material for rebuilding a nation's political identity is another question. Is a nation's courage in facing down its historical crimes an effective glue to bond a society—or, alternatively, is victimhood a better wellspring for solidarity? Might shame, victimhood and for that matter pride intermingle in confecting that complex cocktail that is national identity?

The politics of memory

Birthing out of a common trauma, the European Union is at its core a Freudian project, with all founding members of 1957 being recently defeated or occupied nations. After 1989, the approach that post-war Germany had taken in tackling its grim past became Europe's assumed archetype of how eastern Europe would accomplish the same for Communism. But the eastern European countries failed to emulate it, and indeed many now fear, that with the rise of the far-right German AfD, the model itself may be in crisis at home as well. Perhaps successful atonement relies on the contingencies of time as well as place.

Central and eastern Europe returned instead into a world where competitive victimhood has the status of natural law.



Nation states lost interest in the suffering they had piled on others, and insisted instead that a laser-like focus be placed on the suffering they had endured.

The Polish parliament enacted a law (later amended) in 2018 that could incarcerate any person claiming that Poles contributed to Jewish suffering during the Second World War. (The saga of the Polish-American historian Jan Gross, who in 2015 caused controversy in his native country by saying—correctly—that Poles had killed many more Jews than they had Germans, was undoubtedly a factor in the Polish government’s whitewashing of its history). And for its part, in the most historically specious way possible, Russia began to blame Poland for starting the Second World War.

“Exceptionalism is a necessary condition for effective reconciliation”

The resistance to the German model of “working off” its past was most spectacular in Russia. During Putin’s second term one of us happened to be in Moscow when US historian and writer Anne Applebaum presented the Russian translation of her prize-winning book *Gulag*. In a smoked-filled café not far from Lubyanka, the old KGB (now FSB) headquarters, the book launch turned out to be anti-climactic. Few showed up to celebrate with the author and the general mood was one of torpor.

In the late 1980s, in the heady days of *perestroika*, publication of a book like this would have been an event packed with a surfeit of political and intellectual worthies. But during Putin’s second term, the atmosphere had changed: the audience was now composed of mostly older people for whom events like these had become ritualised as a kind of civic duty.

Applebaum’s talk, in the end, was actually not about the gulag. Rather, it was about the reluctance of the Russian authorities and the majority of the Russian public to condemn Stalin’s crimes. When we know that Stalin killed more Russians than any foreign invader, she asked, why are so many reticent to impugn him or his regime?

Without saying so explicitly, Applebaum’s puzzle was to understand why post-communist Russia had become markedly different from post-war Germany. Where was the Russian counterpart to Willy Brandt falling to his knees in atonement at the Warsaw ghetto in 1970? Why was this generation of young Russians unwilling to raise the inconvenient questions that youthful Germans peppered their parents with after 1968? The audience was respectful but unmoved. None of those present could ever be suspected of being an apologist for Stalin. Yet Applebaum’s message fell on deaf ears.

Somehow the intellectuals had grown to think that denouncing Stalin would be acquiescing too readily in what the west was asking (demanding, really) of them. They were finished with living according to western edicts. Back in the 1990s signing on to the German

approach to the politics of memory had been seen by Russians as joining a civilised club whose members all wished to credibly confront their demons. But once this wave of “correctness” had run its course, Russians—even former true believers in the German “model”—were often looking for the restoration of the nation’s power, and for the restoration of its exceptionalism. Russians demanded their own *Sonderweg*.

Russian intellectuals have lost faith that their nation should follow the turbulent self-examination that Germans endured. Russia’s liberals at the book launch were still hostile to Communism, if somewhat nostalgic for the clarity and communality of the Soviet Union. Two decades after the Cold War’s end they felt like losers (more like post-Versailles than post-Second World War Germany perhaps). Of course, they were appalled by their government’s efforts to normalise Stalin; certainly they looked on aghast at the polling numbers already showing Stalin valorised. But they feared that by condemning Stalin they would become complicit in the west’s impulse to deprive Russia of its role defeating Hitler, and saving the world from fascism. (A similar reluctance can be seen in Britain when Churchill’s imperial adventures are criticised, as though this is somehow sullying his heroic role in the war.)

Overall, they tended to understand the short Soviet century as an unfinished civil war in which perpetrators became victims and victims perpetrators. This struggle will need to be resolved in Russia—atonement, after all, begins at home. It is a domestic problem and reinforces the necessity of exceptionalism.

Ultimately, what made Russia different from Germany was that, paradoxically, Germany’s politics of memory was a way to resurrect German exceptionalism. Germany became an exception because it parted with the received wisdom that “evil is what others do” and concentrated instead on its own crimes and misdeeds—a unique evil in the history of the world.

Exceptionalism is, in the analysis here, a necessary condition for effective reconciliation. It can’t be imported; it should be invented. What was significant about Germany is how it was able to justify its coping with the past. When this coping is truly exceptional you can even craft, as was done in Germany, a new national identity. But this will only work if you can turn guilt into pride. If guilt ends in humiliation it won’t work—so the post-Soviet Russian transformation into a kind of submission was destined to backfire.

What the Russian experience instructs us is that America’s and Britain’s wider attempts to deal with their sorrow-filled legacies will have a chance to succeed only if it is framed as a victory of sorts. Instead of being proud of its empire, its “peculiar institutions” or its dictators, a country should aim to become proud of the distinctive way in which it has dealt with its distinctively troubled legacy. This can’t be a way to make a country “normal,” but must be an opportunity to reclaim its exceptional character and set it to work for the good. ■

Ivan Krastev is the co-author with Stephen Holmes of “The Light that Failed: A Reckoning” (Allen Lane); Leonard Benardo is vice president of the Open Society Foundations

Facing the past:
Convicts at a
hard labour
camp in Siberia



GETTING

SOMEWHERE

THE POLITICAL CLASS HAS LEARNED
THE HARD WAY HOW MUCH PEOPLE'S
SENSE OF PLACE MATTERS. IT IS HIGH TIME
ECONOMISTS CAUGHT UP

PAUL COLLIER

Even the faintest acquaintance with economic history is enough to know that the passage of time is important—a factory worker in the earliest days of the industrial revolution was lucky to have shoes and hungry most of the time, whereas a factory worker today is more likely to feel pinched by the cost of running a car or a Sky TV subscription. Why? Societies develop new technologies, learn how to do things more efficiently and make themselves richer in the process. Mainstream economists recognise this, and build rising productivity and “know-how” into their models. But if time is something economics can cope with, it has—at least until recently—shown much less interest in space.

There are vast and persistent differences in incomes across countries, regions and cities, and yet economics has not found a general way of approaching this. Despite the advances of “behavioural economics,” which has belatedly acknowledged that we are not guided purely by rational calculations but also by the framing of choices and cultural expectations, the discipline remains stubbornly wedded to the individual as the unit of analysis. In reality, our productivity is determined collectively, by the communities in which we live, and these are in turn defined just as much by place as by time.

The last few years have made plain, too, how place matters for our political views: witness the Brexit rebellion of provincial England and Wales. In truth it might be that, as much as anything else, which has finally shaken mainstream policy wonks into realising that it is worth giving some thought to communities, and the way we belong to them.

ARID PLACE

I was pleased to be asked by *Prospect* to write about Martin Sandbu's *The Economics of Belonging* as I have just finished writing a book with John Kay on what I thought was the same topic. The field involves a challenging synthesis of economics with recent work in evolutionary biology, political science, neuroscience, moral philosophy and decisions under uncertainty: the more people who are attracted to work on it the better. Unfortunately, if John and I have written a book on the economics of belonging, Sandbu hasn't. His book is modestly useful as far as it goes, but it is confined to the application of conventional economic policy instruments such as taxes and transfers, with the purpose of reducing national inequality in the ability to consume. It is predicated on the presumption that “belonging” means nothing more than “participating in the economic benefits of.”

Its motivating force is to exonerate globalisation from the blame for inequality, and to argue that if anything it is part of the solution, not the problem. Calling this “the economics of belonging” may indicate deficient awareness of sources of meaning and wellbeing beyond personal consumption. To draw on David Goodhart's apt concepts of global and local identity in *The Road to Somewhere*, the book verges on a caricature of “Anywhere” bewilderment at the recent political mutiny of “Somewheres.”

Having lived in Oslo, Oxford, New York and London, and as the *Financial Times*'s economic commentator for Europe, Sandbu is a fully paid-up Anywhere, even equipped with a PPE degree. He displays PPE's hallmarks of confidence and lucidity. But he also displays its characteristic weakness: he is not adequately equipped to analyse the highly complex phenomenon of belonging that he claims to have resolved.

His book gives the impression of having been written in the wake of last year's European parliamentary elections, and the momentary rise of the Brexit Party. As an Anywhere whose professional focus is Europe, he sets out to answer the question of how best this nightmare can be made to go away. And his answer is that enough of those who currently support upstart movements, like the Brexit Party, need to get sufficient extra money to ensure that they revert to their past quiescence. Shorn of its fringe support from the economically disaffected, the shrivelled "hard core" of anti-globalisers, who are culturally averse to the new age of universal individual rights, open borders, and transnational markets, can be safely ignored until they gradually die out. The "liberal" order can then continue to reign: it is potentially good for everyone, if only the details of economic policies are tweaked appropriately.

In truth, at the European level such adjustments would need to be far-reaching. Since Maastricht, the four flagship priorities of the commission have been the internal market, free movement, the euro and the promotion of European identity. Inadvertently, each of these has worked to undermine previous spatial convergence (my critique, given as the keynote for the new commission's recent conference on "The European Economy in the 2020s," is in January's *InterEconomics*).

PLUMMY PROVINCIALISM

Sandbu does offer a sensible critique of financialisation and modern business ethics, but this is hardly original—see the work of Colin Mayer and Rachel Henderson. His main claim, though, is that the economic policies that he proposes—raising the minimum wage, universal basic income and wealth taxes—are radical and innovative. Unfortunately, he was pre-empted here in January by Thomas Piketty's new tome, *Capitalism and Ideology*, which over 1,200 pages explores the fiscal policies that might address inequality much more thoroughly, with a particular emphasis upon wealth taxes. Piketty emphasises that a discussion of economic policies has to be set in a historical and social context, which explains the volume's vast bulk. That crucial recognition would have helped in this book too.

The Economics of Belonging had, however, already been overtaken by events before Piketty. On 12th December the British political landscape changed dramatically and the Brexit Party became a footnote in history. Despite being a Conservative with a plummy Etonian accent, Boris Johnson was able to present himself convincingly to the provincial working class as the real anti-establishment revolutionary, contrasting with the untrustworthy Marxist cosmopolitan

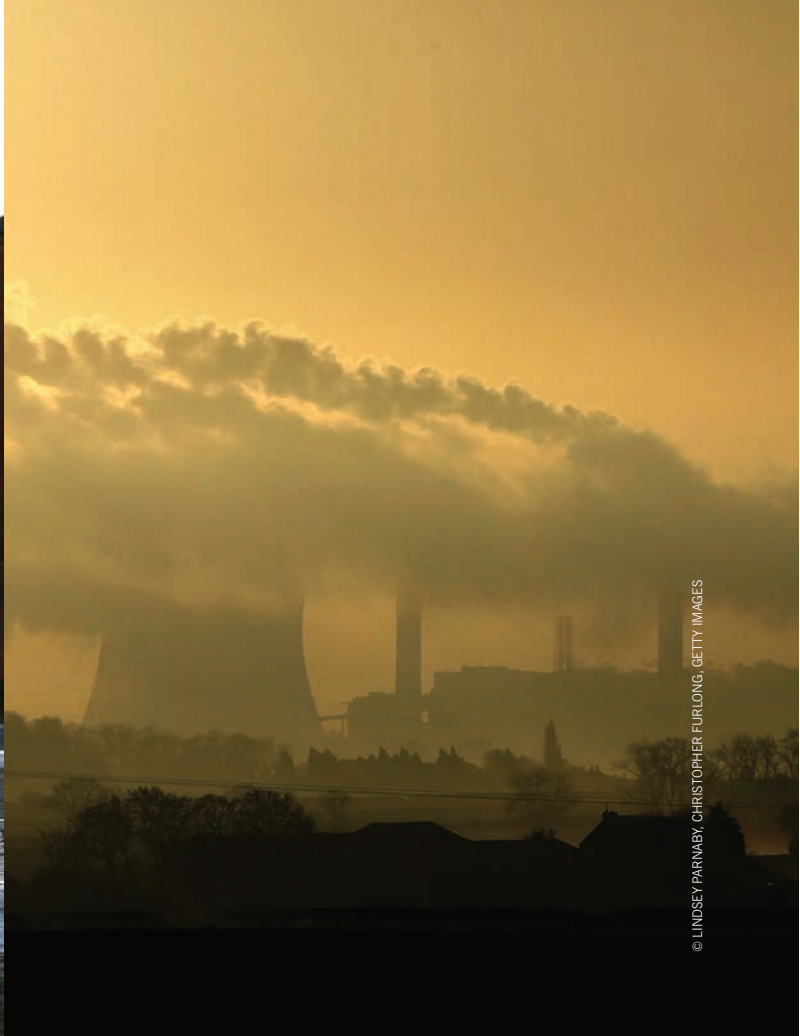
heading the Labour Party. His promise was to rescue them from abandonment. Even if we only focus on the Bs—Bassetlaw, Blyth Valley, Bolsover—we can see why the long-eroding bricks that had made up Labour's "red wall" since before the war finally crumbled. Johnson lost no time in moving to cement his new coalition. By February, even before the pandemic was overshadowing everything else in British politics, he and his chancellor, Rishi Sunak, were already announcing open-ended commitments to "levelling up" Britain's grossly unequal spatial economy.

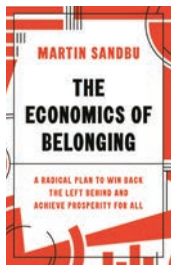
"JOHNSON TRULY IS PINIONED TO 'LEVELLING-UP'—BY THE NORTHERN TOWNS THAT HAVE LENT HIM HIS LARGE MAJORITY"

This same—distinctively spatial—inequality had obviously been at the heart of the original Brexit mutiny, which Johnson had ridden to No 10. The Left unthinkingly presumed that the game plan was betrayal—to shelter behind the flag as a nationalist movement, in order to plot a deepening of "neoliberalism." Far from being gripped by a Thatcherite ideology of market fundamentalism, however, the new government actually is pinioned to levelling up by a pragmatic recognition of a fundamental shift in political identity in many communities of northern England that have, for the moment, lent it a healthy majority. By throwing off their ancestral loyalty to Labour and making themselves into Britain's new swing marginal seats, these towns have made their votes count for a long time to come. The people of Somewhere—for so long assumed to have "nowhere to go" politically—had hit back decisively at the fringe of Anywhere individualists (aka successful Londoners).

Sandbu must surely approve of this: he accepts the need to equip "individuals *and* places to thrive in the new economy," and does include a chapter on how to help provincial cities. But he explains he has left this to the end of the book because all his national egalitarian policies would already go a long way to redressing regional imbalance. Nevertheless, within the limits of the book, his analysis of place-based policies is sound. As he acknowledges, reversing decline in a poor region is complex: many things have been tried, and they have all failed. Correctly, he suggests that what is likely to be needed is a package of policies, and the package he proposes is sensible, if insufficient.

But he misses the three points fundamental to making levelling up work. The first is grasping what the complexity and historic failure tells us—namely, that we don't and cannot expect to start out with the answers. The challenge of levelling up is an instance of "radical uncertainty," with the chances of success not governed by known probabilities, but resting on all sorts of known unknowns and indeed unknown ▶





The Economics of Belonging
by Martin Sandbu
(Princeton UP,
£20)

unknowns. The overconfidence that pervades the book is entirely misplaced.

The wise response to radically uncertain terrain is, as Kay and Mervyn King have argued in a recent book as well as an essay in the May issue of *Prospect*, humility—to face up to everything you don't know about what needs to be done, and proceed through experiment and learn-as-you-go. This leads to the second great omission. By confining his discussion to national economic technocracy, Sandbu reinforces the delusion that everything could be put right from an all-seeing Whitehall, if only there were the political will to do it.

And yet now with Johnson and Sunak there is, if only out of electoral self-preservation, a clear political will. Whitehall, though, will still not be able to achieve regional convergence. It is too distant from local knowledge to design a context-pertinent package, and too remote (and perhaps too arrogant) to absorb the tacit knowledge that will be generated by learning from experiments on the ground. The problem is not will but Whitehall.

LOCAL STORIES

The second big problem is that politically, any centralised authority will struggle to justify doing different things in different places—it runs into the accusation of favouritism. The most vital policy to revive regional economies is, therefore, the devolution of political authority over the design and implementation of regeneration strategy to city-regions. This must be matched by sufficient local retention of the revenues of national taxes, supplemented by transfers from the metropole to finance the strategy. By tying a tourniquet of centralist assumptions around his policy discussion, Sandbu excludes the most urgent aspect of reform required.

Besides, finally, as he belatedly acknowledges, the Brexit mutiny was not truly about the inequality of household incomes. Rather, I think it takes us back to culture—the culture of a place as a community constituted by a web of relationships and networks of communication. Such a culture can be (and often once was) proud, or it can be (and too often now is) beset by negative feedbacks and characterised by despair and denigration.

The spatial allocation of activity is fairly stable but potentially highly indeterminate: most of the knowledge clusters on which modern prosperity is built could, in principle, be almost anywhere. Investment decisions are therefore determined by the narratives that circulate in local networks. Despondent narratives discourage investment, trapping poor regions into a locally stable equilibrium. The task is to reset them, and we do not really know how to do it. Covid-19 amplifies some of these uncertainties, but also drags the concept of community centre-stage. Polls show strong support for a sense of togetherness: not the individual rights and group privileges beloved of metropolitan culture, but instead common belonging. It is thus a moment that could give us a political opening.

One obvious question which Sandbu never answers adequately is why Britain's gross spatial inequality—now the worst of any major OECD society—was allowed to widen relentlessly for 40 years by governments of both right and left. As I argued in *The Future of Capitalism* and an accompanying *Prospect* essay (“How to Save Britain from London,” November 2018), I think that the most plausible answer is that the Anywheres distanced themselves from the rest of society. Since both political parties were monopolised by unrepresentative minorities in which Anywheres predominated, the grievances of the provincial working class went unnoticed.

Sandbu's hero is my friend Dani Rodrik, but his reading has been selective. Here is Rodrik, writing last year: “cosmopolitan globalists—citizens of nowhere in Theresa May's evocative language—have managed to revoke their responsibilities within their home nation without in fact taking on corresponding obligations anywhere else. The resulting economic and social polarisation within nations makes it much more difficult to construct a ‘unifying narrative.’” This excellent restatement of the proposition fatally undermines that of Sandbu that the income distribution is all we need to understand the backlash against globalisation.

Rodrik invited me to address his annual conference at Harvard—on the subject of migration—as he wanted me to set out the recent theory of the economics of metropolitan agglomeration, and explain how skilled metropolitans could end up being able to capture too many of the “rents” of agglomeration, rents which rightly belong to the entire country. In the UK, skilled metropolitans are highly productive not, as they tell themselves, because they are individually amazingly talented, but because they are clustered together in the headquarters of the most highly centralised state in the western world, endowed with decades of biased provision of infrastructure and research funding.

The rapid influx of skilled foreigners to London has inadvertently aggravated the consequent transfer of rents from the provincial population to those in London, by turning it into a transfer from citizens to non-citizens. One of the conceits of the “Everywheres” is that governments owe the same obligations to non-citizens as to citizens. This reflects a failure to comprehend the essence of successful society: a dense web of mutual obligations between citizens, implemented by government. Furthermore, had these plum positions been filled by British citizens drawn from the provinces, it would at least have strengthened social bonds between the successful regions and the failing ones. In the event, since the social links of foreigners to provincial Britain were weak, it may have compounded the disdainful detachment of successful people, and the ruinous neglect that went with it.

Both these effects—the transfer of rents, and the weakening of inter-regional bonds—imply that globalisation is not innocent of specifically spatial distributional consequences, quite aside from the job losses that Sandbu does acknowledge in keeping with the conventional analysis. Crucially, the failure of ▶

The three Bs:
Nigel Farage on
the campaign
trail in Bolsover
last year; Blyth
Valley on the
morning after
the 2019
election; the
West Burton
Power Station in
Bassetlaw

public policy to offset any of this has been part of the *political* effect of globalisation as we have built it—a system of rules deemed beyond the reach of national governments and elections, which allows the “Anywheres,” who thrive under these rules, to shrug off their responsibilities to fellow citizens—just as Rodrik suggests.

A TRULY SOCIAL SCIENCE

So, what do I think the economics of belonging is truly about? It starts from recent research in evolutionary-cum-anthropological biology which shows that humans have evolved to be radically distinctive among mammals (see scholars such as Robert Boyd and Peter Richerson, Joe Henrich and Nicholas Christakis). We are hard-wired to “belong” both to a group of people (pro-sociality), and to a place (territoriality). Most people in Britain live within 20 miles of where they grew up. This is not an anachronism—it is natural. Most of us would instinctively grasp this; it is an oddity of the arid and individualistic character of economics that, until recently, it did not.

Forcing clever young people to choose between leaving their home for London to take a chance on their talents, and retaining the meaning they get from participation in their community, is a failure of public policy—every uprooted person is a loss of wellbeing, which with different policy might have been avoided. Conversely, attracting “diversity” to London may have boosted productivity, but it has not generated a commensurate upsurge in wellbeing—however fun it has been for some restaurant-loving journalists. On the contrary, despite high incomes and disproportionate public service spending, official data on self-reported wellbeing shows London with the lowest scores in the whole country. Only on one psychologically measured characteristic does it come top: anxiety. The open door, the bravura about London being the global city, and what fun the post-national society provides, seems to have lured people to miserable lives. Even the well off don’t seem too satisfied with it. And of course, Covid-19 is now inducing much reassessment of our lifestyles.

“ATTRACTING ‘DIVERSITY’ TO LONDON HAS NOT GENERATED AN UPSURGE IN WELLBEING—HOWEVER FUN IT HAS BEEN FOR SOME RESTAURANT-LOVING JOURNALISTS”

It is always *communities*, whether spatial or not, which serve as the central entities in navigating the social, economic and political decisions that have to be taken, often under conditions of radical uncertainty. Communities are central for decision-taking because they are the vehicles through which the uniquely human practice of emulation occurs. Within communities, narratives circulate: they tell us who we are; how our world works; and how we should bestow our respect or disapproval on others. Crucially, they are the main mechanism by which collective knowledge is shared and accumulated. Our individual decisions are largely based not on observation of the external world—as assumed in PPE economics—but by drawing on this collective brain. And over the course of evolution, this has proved to be rational as a species—most of the time, collective wisdom is far better than our own.

THE COALFACE OF EXPERIENCE

Choices that reflect our belonging are fundamental to our behaviour, and consequently to public policy. At a minimum, to set public policy coherently, it is essential to understand the narratives that different communities have come to believe: this is, in essence, why the official Leave campaign beat the Remain campaign. But public policy can also aim to be more ambitious: new narratives promoted by public figures can potentially become tools to reset the story, something which we are not yet sure how to do, but which the best public officials, like Andy Haldane, the Chief Economist at the Bank of England, do grasp, understanding what will have to be done. This new truly social psychology contrasts with the older individual psychology of “biases” in human decision-taking which Whitehall has gleefully embraced through the “nudge” agenda. “Nudge” tells us that humans are quite bad at calculating probabilities, and are “blind to the obvious”: we are, in short, not as good as a computer at being Economic Man. The assumption is that computer-aided Whitehall expertise knows best, and can shunt us towards better choices.

But this is to misunderstand why we are not good at being Economic Man. Having evolved in an unknowable world in which things like the new coronavirus can suddenly emerge, we survive with the help of a collective brain that learns as it goes, through mutual sharing of decisions taken where tacit knowledge forms—not through Whitehall-issued advice, but at the coalface of experience. Humans are not dumb: we are amazingly creative. We are not blind: we are amazingly good at focusing on the purpose at hand. Without input from creative human purpose, a computer would be blind and dumb.

There is a further layer to the collective brain of a community. Through it, a community can develop common, forward-looking purpose, which is then reinforced by a sense of mutual obligation. A community—whether a place or an organisation—can become morally load-bearing. For most purposes, because communities are closer to the sort of knowledge that comes with doing something specific in a specific real community than Whitehall can ever hope to be, they are better able to build common purposes that are appropriate to needs, and better able to implement them, adjusting rapidly to fresh evidence. Whitehall does not know best; nor, usually, is it well suited to getting us to behave well.

That is a nutshell guide to the economics of belonging, at least as I would understand it. *The Economics of Belonging* is a competent, confidently articulated survey of the academic economics literature on inequality. But as to belonging, much as I would welcome such a book, I haven’t found it here. For all its sloppiness and crudity, the political debate still looks to be ahead of that of conventional economics. **P**

Paul Collier’s latest book with John Kay, “Greed is Dead: Politics after Individualism,” published by Allen Lane, is out now



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Creating a chain reaction

How dealing with the past is fuelling the future at the UK's most famous nuclear site

In 2012, Parliament introduced possibly the most important piece of legislation you've never heard of. Despite commanding enthusiastic cross-party support, the Public Services (Social Value) Act arrived with little fanfare.

Its aim is to ensure the public sector takes into account economic, social, and environmental factors when commissioning services. And for so-called 'left behind' communities, it could be life changing.

Jamie Reed, head of corporate affairs at Sellafield Ltd explains how the legislation triggered a chain reaction which is taking West Cumbria on a transformational journey.

“For decades, certain businesses have sought to meet challenges that extend beyond a straightforward businesslike existence. For some this is about brand enhancement, for others a straightforward, traditional approach to corporate philanthropy, whether through Corporate Social Responsibility or other initiatives.

At Sellafield Ltd, we've developed an approach that delivers enhanced value from our activities far beyond our primary responsibility to remediate the Sellafield nuclear site.

Owned by the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA), our day job is to meet the environmental and engineering challenges posed by one of the world's most complex nuclear clean-up challenges.

But our ambition has never stopped at our perimeter fence.

Our SI* programme (social impact multiplied) ensures that at least £10m per year is spent by the business in the communities closest to our operations on projects co-created with local communities and based on key Sustainable Development Goals identified by the United Nations. This investment leverages in funding from other sources – often three times as much – and addresses longstanding areas in need of improvement in those identified communities.

SI* demonstrates how Sellafield Ltd is working to improve the sustainability of the communities in which we operate and in which the majority of our workforce lives.

In the process we are helping to create an environment capable of supporting the eco-system of businesses we require to com-

plete our estimated 100-year mission, and the skilled workers and healthy communities necessary for this mission to succeed. This doesn't simply embody the spirit of the Social Value ethos: it lives it. Crucially, this work also helps to deliver the ambitions of the national Industrial Strategy with its emphasis on place-based economic development, building upon the strengths of regions across the UK.

This approach helps to deliver the best possible value for the UK from the approximate £2bn of public money required to deliver the Sellafield mission each year and now sits at the forefront of advanced business approaches to achieving social value anywhere in Britain.”

Sellafield Ltd's SI* programme focuses upon six objectives:

- 1. Resilient Economies** Projects that enable inclusive growth in the capacity, diversity and capability of our local economies
- 2. Thriving Communities** Projects that assist our communities to thrive by supporting sustainable activities that create self-reliance and independence
- 3. Social Value Chains** Projects that create the maximum social impact through the Sellafield supply chain
- 4. Sustainable Incomes** Projects that improve access to sustainable incomes, beyond Sellafield Ltd, by increasing skills, knowledge and access to economic opportunity
- 5. Collective Impact** Projects that leverage collective impact and investment by engaging and working with our stakeholders and partners from our local communities
- 6. Improved Performance** Success across these objectives helps to drive improved performance in the delivery of the Sellafield mission and in the value provided to the taxpayer as a consequence.



Sellafield Ltd's investment in Whitehaven includes a new campus for a mainstream secondary school and special educational needs school



Since 2017, this approach has delivered significant success for those communities closest to Sellafield's operations.

Campus Whitehaven In Whitehaven – the largest town closest to the Sellafield site – Sellafield invested £10m into a new school campus which brought together a mainstream secondary school in need of replacement with a special educational needs school. This leveraged in excess of £30m with which a new school campus was built – representing the single largest investment in education seen in the town in over half a century.

The WELL Project Co-created with local schools and Cumbria County Council, the 'Western Excellence in Leadership and Learning' (WELL) project is a £1.7m investment from Sellafield Ltd designed to raise attainment in every classroom in West Cumbria. Incorporating every primary and secondary school in the local authority areas of Allerdale and Copeland.

Economic Development and Diversification In working to diversify those local economies most dependent upon Sellafield, investment has been made to leverage funding for the development of economic sectors unrelated to the nuclear industry. A £3.6m injection into a derelict bus station will soon become a business start-up centre for West Cumbrian entrepreneurs and a further £1.1m investment has helped to secure an additional £2.4m from the government's Coastal Communities Fund with which to create a coastal activity centre on Whitehaven's historic harbour.

Helping Communities Cope with Crisis When the Covid-19 pandemic affected those communities closest to its operations, Sellafield worked with local recovery agencies to help provide food for the most vulnerable as well as £200,000 for the procurement of 20,000 items of PPE for the NHS in Cumbria. As the national economic recovery effort unfolds, Sellafield Ltd's Si^x programme provides a platform for economic recovery for its local communities.

Increasingly, more is being asked of companies by their employees and the communities in which they are based.

In 2019, the widely respected Edelman Trust Barometer found that, overwhelmingly, employees expect their employers to be their partners in change – 67% of employees expected their company to tackle social issues – prompting Edelman to recommend that companies should care for the communities in which they operate by being "...part of the solution on education, inequality and infrastructure."

Last August, after more than forty years of adhering to principles that prioritised shareholder value above everything else, the American Business Roundtable (the US equivalent of the CBI) made a dramatic change to its definition of the Purpose of a Corporation.

Its new Statement on the Purpose of a Corporation was signed by leading American CEOs – including from JP Morgan, Johnson & Johnson and the Ford Foundation – who have now committed to lead their companies for the benefit of all stakeholders – customers, employees, suppliers, communities and shareholders.

With all of this, Sellafield Ltd has been ahead of the curve.

Sellafield is one of the largest industrial sites in the UK and is home to the country's largest concentration of nuclear skills and capabilities. Situated in the local authority area of Copeland, the site accounts for 58.7% of all local employment, directly and indirectly.

As the Si^x programme demonstrates; Sellafield is changing.

Jamie Reed, who is also a former Member of Parliament for Copeland explains: "Delivering the Sellafield mission, in the national interest, is our primary objective. Wherever possible, we want to do this in a way which maximises the return on the public investment made in Sellafield and which helps the economies of those communities closest to our business to become more resilient and diverse.

The Si^x programme is a key part of this: I'm not aware of any other business in our country making this degree of investment or demonstrating the level of collaboration with local stakeholders that we are. The Sellafield site has existed for over 70 years and we have a century of work still ahead of us.

At every point, we must maximise the value of the money we spend: for the taxpayer, our business, the NDA and our local communities. Our Si^x programme does this, and, for all of our achievements so far, we're still at the start of this process. The world is changing, business is changing and the potential for positive change is enormous."

Si^x
Social impact multiplied

 **Sellafield Ltd**



A
world
with
less
travel

Our aviation addiction was threatening the planet. After the grounding of lockdown, can we finally kick the habit?

BARBARA SPEED

An alien monitoring life on planet Earth over the past few months would have struggled to spot what's been going on: Covid-19 is invisible, and its symptoms hardly distinctive. But what *would* have stuck out—even from space—was that a vast proportion of the world's people and traffic had stopped moving.

It has been remarkable to witness because until this spring, for as long as anyone can remember, the world was becoming ever-more mobile. Give or take the odd minor blip for a recession, decade-on-decade there has been more international travel, and over the last generation trains have become more packed. Up until the start of this year, Britons were travelling abroad at the highest rate on record, taking almost twice as many holidays as we did only a couple of decades ago. And it's not just in Britain: across our heating planet, the number of flights taken increased by 4 per cent between 2018 and 2019.

There was always a political row about some new transport brainwave—an extra runway for Heathrow? HS2 or not?—and in the background, a nagging sense grew that our hypermobility might not be sustainable, as experts warned that aviation emissions could wreck the Paris climate targets. And yet, in our globalised pre-Covid age, study, leisure, business, family and love created more ties around the world. We somehow came to regard the dispersal of people as being natural and inevitable. The serious options for cutting back on flights, and saving the planet—like taxing air fuel in the same way as car fuel, or more radically rationing them—were controversial in the extreme. An industry survey in 2019 found that 47 per cent of British people didn't believe anyone should be discouraged to fly, even if it might have a negative impact on the environment.

As in other areas of life, however, the arrival of the first new deadly globetrotting pathogen in a century has turned the unthinkable into fact. Come March 2020, and suddenly cars were parked for weeks on end. Trains grew less frequent and rumbled along virtually empty. Planes were grounded. Emissions plummeted. We darted out of our homes for less than an hour at a time; in some countries, people couldn't even do that. The American expression was perhaps the most apt: we sheltered in place.

Now, we stand at a crossroads. Once this pandemic is “all over” (whenever that might be) will we race back to rail, road and sky, eager to catch up on the holidays we missed? Perhaps. But it is also possible to imagine a second future, in which the pandemic and the resulting strain on transport and travel industries create a lasting change. Some airlines, airports, and routes will, without intervention, close for good. Having been forced by

circumstance (and enabled by technology) to work from home, many more of us are likely to continue doing so. The business model of public transport could be forever changed. And something more fundamental may have changed in our own minds: we may have a new fear of enclosed carriages and cabins, or perhaps do a little soul-searching about how much of that travel was necessary in the first place.

So exactly how damaging would less travel be to our society? That depends, of course, on whether our perceptions of its benefits in the pre-Covid world stack up. And it's important to ask whether they are about snobbery—or something more.

The template for our current approach to holidays was formed by the upper classes during the 17th and 18th centuries, when young men and women, usually in their late teens or twenties, would travel to Europe on a “Grand Tour” to see the sights, study art and culture, eat and drink, and then show off about it afterwards, not least through expensive souvenirs displayed in their homes. From at least the 18th century, travel has been seen by those with the resources to do it as a way to broaden horizons—touring the continent, perhaps to study the Old Masters, as artists like Turner and writers like Shelley and Byron did.

“Our approach to holidays was formed by the ‘Grand Tours’ of the old upper class: sights, art, drink—and showing off afterwards”

The idea of travelling to broaden the mind became practically a prerequisite of a refined upbringing. As historian Lisa Colletta writes in *The Legacy of the Grand Tour*, “a tour of the continent was seen as the ideal means of imparting culture, taste, knowledge, self-assurance, and polished manners.” But it's hard to disentangle such claims from the cruder use of travel as a status symbol: if overseas tours achieved nothing else, they demonstrated that you could afford them. Until the second half of the 20th century, leisure travel of any kind was hugely expensive, and also slow—and so involved taking a break from earning money that none but the elite could countenance. (Summer bank holidays gave British seaside towns a shot in the arm from the late 19th century onwards, but until the Holidays with Pay Act 1938, most leave was taken unpaid.) In Dickens's *Little Dorrit*, the Dorrit family come into some wealth and embark on a tour of Europe to confirm their new status as people of refinement. Travel was aspirational—it existed in the popular consciousness as a sign of wealth, worldliness and education.

Back then, it was impossible to experience many aspects of art and culture without making tracks, but is that still true now that screens can provide a window on the world? At the very least, high-minded lectures from trustafarians about lessons learned on their “gap yabs” have become harder to stomach.

And yet, research seems to confirm that foreign travel enriches. Social psychologist Adam Galinsky has shown, variously, that fashion designers who had lived abroad were more creative, and ▶



that when students were asked to remember an experience overseas, they displayed better problem-solving abilities. Galinsky told the *Atlantic* that travelling abroad even boosted participants' "faith in humanity." A study on Chinese tourists led by Tony SM Tse found that those who travelled abroad felt a greater sense of purpose in life.

But this good news comes with caveats. Across his studies into the subject, Galinsky has found that the associations with positive outcomes are much stronger for those who have *lived* abroad, and engaged fully with other cultures—a fashion designer working overseas is a different proposition from going on a stag do, or making a brief business trip to a faceless conference centre. The benefits of travel seem to come from dedicated cultural engagement, rather than the simple act of stepping onto a plane.

So the question becomes how much of the sort of travel we do is of the engaging or enriching type. Almost a fifth of British visits overseas in 2019 were to Spain, where those who grandly imagine themselves as "travellers" rather than "tourists" might argue travel is often done for the "wrong reasons." Sure, some will visit the Alhambra or the Guggenheim in Bilbao, but—as there has been since the "lift off" of package holidays in the 1970s—there will be many more sun-worshippers heading for beaches but staying in hotels that provide English breakfasts and English newspapers.

After the 1990s, the budget airlines boom—both EasyJet and Ryanair were established in 1995—took things up another notch. They created a situation where a flight to Europe was cheaper, in many cases, than a train ticket to another part of the UK. And the cumulative growth in foreign travel became mind-boggling: whereas in 1960 only 8 per cent of the population travelled abroad, in the 12 months to July 2019, 64 per cent of us did. Each of us is also travelling more often, on average, but for shorter periods of time. Whether it's a loved-up long weekend in Prague, or a hen night in Tallinn, the brevity of many trips implies that the ratio of cultural benefits to air miles is probably getting worse: there isn't time to properly engage.

While tourism snobbery certainly persists—"cultural" trips and package holidays are still viewed differently—it is now much more about quality than quantity. Across the social classes, we now share the idea that overseas travel is a part of our lives and that it is a good thing: that it allows us to relax in a way we wouldn't at home, and perhaps "broadens the mind." And pre-coronavirus it was something we were deeply reluctant to cut back on: a 2019 report from Deloitte notes: "Many consumers prioritise holiday spending over other leisure categories, above all, presumably, when their budgets are tighter: 39 per cent said that they would prefer to save for a holiday rather than spend money on other leisure." If Covid-19 jolts us into taking a different and more sparing attitude to travel, then that will represent a fundamental resetting—which could turn out to be one of the most enduring legacies of the virus.

Should we really expect that? Travel has always been intimately connected to disease. Humans and their movements are the vectors for infectious illnesses: we are, as much as the viruses themselves, the cause of epidemics. Just as trading routes spread plague-ridden fleas in earlier times, the 1918-9 Spanish Flu was turbo-charged by the mass movement of troops at the end of the First World War. Back then, however, there was no retreat from travel: sun-seeking holidays were looked on by the upper classes as a way to purge the after-effects of the virus.

Is there any reason to think it will be different this time? Well, in the 21st century, it is possible to point the finger at travel in much more forensic ways. The movement of Covid-19 from country to country can sometimes be traced to particular places, for example ski resorts, or trips taken by individuals—one so-called "super spreader" Steve Walsh, Britain's first confirmed case, had travelled back from Singapore via a French chalet and was linked to a further 11 cases.

“How much of our travel is truly of the engaging or enriching sort?”

None of this is good for the allure or the image of travelling, and—more than that—there are tough immediate implications for its economics. To put it simply, most areas of transport beyond cars and cycling are under huge threat. BA plans to cut 12,000 jobs, EasyJet will let over 700 pilots go and abandon three of its UK bases, and Virgin Atlantic will axe up to a third of jobs. Ryanair, EasyJet and BA have all received hundreds of millions of pounds through the Bank of England's Coronavirus Corporate Financing Facility to help them weather the pandemic.

The business models of airlines and public transport rely on putting a lot of people into an enclosed space. Decisions about social distancing stipulations—whether they remain at "one-metre plus"—will have an enormous impact. Some budget airlines haven't been enforcing distancing, though the EU recommended at the end of May that they should. When EasyJet recommenced flights in mid-June, passengers were occupying full rows—Michael Fonso, the airline's chief medical adviser, said: "Social distancing is simply not practical on a plane."

The fact that flights operate between different countries, which may have vastly different infection rates and rules around quarantine, is an added complication. John Lennon, Dean of the Glasgow School for Business and Society, told me that this crisis could spell the end of the budget airline model altogether: "These airlines are all pretty much out of cash, they can't continue. It's not that there won't be any flights but there will be less flights, less routes and they'll be more expensive, and there will certainly be a lot fewer budget deals." ▶

Travel and viral transmission are intimately linked: top, a man disinfects a London bus in the Spanish Flu outbreak of 1918-9; bottom, a similar procedure against coronavirus on a train in Milan

Public transport, falling more directly under government control, is being instructed to enforce social distancing guidelines, a tricky prospect financially given the cost to run the services has remained largely the same. Christian Wolmar, a transport expert, said the continuation of the two-metre rule would have pushed the railways to a point where they couldn't function, running at a maximum of just 10-15 per cent of usual capacity. While the new one-metre rule makes a "big difference," it still only allows for about 40 to 45 per cent capacity. Meanwhile, there is the looming threat that the easing could be reversed if infections rise again.

Wolmar believes that the pandemic could threaten the future of public transport altogether if government does not act quickly to establish safe ways to use it, and support the industry where necessary. He points to data from France and Japan, where restrictions eased earlier and public transport is being used to a much greater degree, yet no new "clusters" of infections have been traced to trains and buses. Yet in the UK, rail use still stood at a vanishingly small 10 per cent of previous usage at the end of June. Car use, meanwhile, is as of 22nd June back up to 72 per cent of previous use, recovering from a low of 27 per cent at the beginning of lockdown.

“Even for some staunch environmentalists, the prospect of less travel will be hard to swallow”

The government has effectively nationalised the rail industry until at least September, suspending rail franchise agreements and taking on any potential losses. This seems remarkable given that this is a government of Conservatives who mostly came of political age in the Thatcher years, and yet it may need to be extended if line service closures are to be avoided. After all, with more home working now a habit, will passenger numbers ever reach pre-March levels again?

Across all modes of transport, there are, then, pressures on costs that could easily translate into prices going up, just as the recession hits consumers' pockets. Without some kind of intervention, a future of less transport, accessible to fewer people, looms. Government decisions in the next few months could determine whether these industries can continue as they were—or, indeed, continue at all.

These are not easy calls to make. Budget airlines are bad for the environment and already rely on generous fuel tax policies to survive. Yet they are also big employers, and the air lobby is influential in Westminster. Is helping them out the best use of the government's money? Public transport is a vital link for many, but some smaller bus and train services were already hanging by a thread. Can they be saved? Should they be?

The real question here, which government will need to consider carefully in the months and years ahead, is this: why do we travel in the first place? Why do we value it? And what moral imperative is there for it to be open to everyone?

This pandemic may remove any element of choice from the equation, if flight prices increase. It seems conceivable that within a few years elites will be travelling to space on commercial flights, while a sizeable proportion of the British population

can no longer afford to fly. Depressingly, fewer flights may not even benefit the environment. Under a UN deal, airlines had agreed to pay to offset carbon omissions above a baseline, which was set as the average of emissions in 2019 and 2020. In June, the EU announced it would be backing international plans to change that baseline, given that this year's figures will be unusually low. We wanted to cut emissions, but now they are nose-diving it seems we can't "afford" to let them.

Even for some staunch environmentalists, the prospect that travel could be off the cards for many of us is hard to swallow. Roger Tyers, a research fellow at Southampton University specialising in public policy around climate and transport, has given up flying himself, but still sees enormous value in overseas travel: "Travel is innate—as humans that we like to explore, we like to wander, and we like to see new things," and hopes that we may develop methods of doing so in a "sustainable way." Of course, travel isn't merely about flying. Tyers points out that before the pandemic, trains were having a renaissance, with plans for new overnight services across Europe.

When historians look back on Britain in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, they may see the era of mass travel abroad as an aberration caused by a combination of an aggressive business model and governments keen to increase connectivity at any cost. But that doesn't mean that the future of travel has to be shaped purely by necessity, or by the fallout of this pandemic. It is possible, I think, to reimagine travel—to make it work better for us and for the world, and to keep the best parts while discarding the most damaging.

What that would look like would depend on your point of view, but it seems hard to argue that every bit of travel we took last year was strictly necessary. Videoconferencing will put paid to many of the business trips or conferences that were deemed essential in the past (along with carbon-heavy business class flights to get there). Quick group trips like stag and hen dos in Europe may be harder to justify with potentially higher flight prices and less connectivity to parts of the UK outside London.

Just as holidays were revolutionised by the introduction of a paid holiday law, businesses could contribute to a changed landscape for travel. If taking three weeks' or a month's holiday was seen as normal, a more expensive flight may be worth it—and it could replace what we might have spent on a handful of shorter trips in 2019. Some smaller employers were already offering extra days of leave if people travelled by train or boat rather than flying, including through a scheme called "Climate Perks," dreamed up by British climate charity 10:10.

Public transport operators, too, could work with whatever "normal" comes to look like rather than fighting it. Wolmar points out that the idea of flexible ticketing, and offering discounts to those commuting a few days a week, had been discussed by rail companies for a long time but had never quite happened.

If this pandemic leads to long-lasting change, then transport will have to adapt. Indeed, many of these problems were already on the table before the pandemic struck. We were already facing an intractable conflict between our desire to fly and the threat of climate change. Changing patterns of work and demography were already threatening the current model of public transport. The solutions might be difficult, and might take time to find, but perhaps we needed a crisis to start the engines. 

Barbara Speed is opinion editor at the i newspaper

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I was Saddam's prisoner

How a holiday to Iraq in the summer of 1990 turned into a months-long nightmare

SAMEER RAHIM

Waiting in the immigration queue at Saddam International Airport, I was feverish with anxiety. I watched as my father, Sadiq Rahim, leaned into a glass booth where an Iraqi officer slowly checked our family's passports. Taped on the glass was a photo of Saddam Hussein in sunglasses and a black beret. Before flying out, our parents had warned my older sister and me that Iraq wasn't like Britain: a stray joke or misplaced comment could land us in serious trouble. Our one protection was our British citizenship—Saddam being an ally of the west. Cigarette smoke drifted from the booth. Then the officer stamped our visa pages and nodded us through. The date was 28th July, 1990. Five days later Iraq invaded Kuwait, and our short tourist trip turned into a months-long nightmare.

Thirty years on, I find it hard to describe what happened to me in Iraq. The bald facts are that, at the age of nine, I was locked up for a month in a Baghdad hotel with my family. We were pawns in a larger diplomatic battle. After the UK condemned the Kuwait invasion and threatened retaliation, all British citizens in Saddam's control were held as bargaining chips. I left with my mother and sister when women and children were released at the end of August. My father was forced to stay on until mid-October.

We were usually described in the press as "human-shield hostages," but that still sounds melodramatic to me. The theory that Saddam kept us close to military targets to deter Allied bombing makes little sense—by the time the Gulf War started in January 1991, he had released us all. Hostages? Well, we weren't allowed to leave our hotel floor and the lifts were guarded by armed goons. But no one actually put a gun to our heads—at least not our family. Saddam called us his "guests," which he might have been delusional enough to believe. The Rahims always refer to it as the time "we got stuck in Iraq," as though we had been caught in motorway traffic. Perhaps a better description would be "enforced lockdown." Like coronavirus, Saddam was unpredictable and potentially lethal; and like now, panic spread by seeing how others, seemingly at random, suffered more than we did.

Perhaps because of the sheer weirdness of the experience, I don't tend to bring it up in conversation. The best time for disclosure, I've found—and my mother and sister say the same—is during the playful interrogation of an office bonding game. Tell us three things about yourself: two lies and one truth. No one ever guesses "I was Saddam Hussein's prisoner." Later, someone might tentatively ask how the experience has affected me. The answer is complex. I was a child at the time, and barely understood what was happening. Much of this article has been retrospectively pieced together from family interviews and newspaper reports. But I did sense my parents' helplessness when they told us we couldn't go home; and I heard the raw fear in the night-time screams piercing our hotel corridor. Looking back, those weeks in Iraq gave me a taste of living in fear—to know that your fate is in the hands of someone with no conscience, and that if a sentence is pronounced no appeal is possible. In short, what ordinary Iraqis suffered all the time under Saddam.

It has also made me reflect on the arbitrary nature of identities—how the privilege of having a British passport was briefly turned into a curse. My family's situation was further complicated by our dual heritage. When Saddam gave the order, I suppose he was imagining that he could use telegenic white families to taunt George HW Bush and Margaret Thatcher. What he didn't anticipate, I'm certain, was the existence of such a thing as a British Muslim. We were an anomaly.

Always
watching: the
omnipresent
Iraqi dictator

There are more layers. We were in Iraq as Shia pilgrims, visiting shrines in Karbala and Najaf during the sacred month of Muharram. Saddam, a secular Sunni, hated Shias because he thought they had sided with Iran during the eight-year war between the countries. Early in his rule, he had murdered senior Shia clerics. My father had delivered speeches in London condemning these atrocities. Could Iraqi spies have been listening in? (This was the source of my anxiety at the immigration queue.) A child's overactive imagination was not so far from reality. A Shia family friend had been arrested while visiting Iraq in the 1980s. Accused of being an Iranian spy, he was held for months, interrogated and tortured—including, I remember this detail, being forced to wash his hands in scalding hot water.

A few days into our trip, we were granted an audience with the most senior cleric in Shia Islam, Grand Ayatollah al-Khoei, at his house in Najaf. I remember sitting for ages with my father in a carpeted reception room. Born in 1899, al-Khoei was a quietist who avoided political interventions. Still, he was an important figurehead who was intensely disliked by Saddam. Access to him was controlled by his sons, who swished round in flowing black cloaks and turbans. (One of them, Majid al-Khoei, would later flee to London and become a good friend of my father's.) We were led to the side room where the ayatollah lay in bed. He had incredibly fair skin and as I bent down to kiss his hand, I saw blue veins under his skin.

“We’re usually described as human shield hostages, but that has always sounded too melodramatic to me”

Our religious duties done, we returned to Baghdad. On the night of 2nd August, we were woken by gunfire. My father went out to investigate and I followed him. We wandered the sodium-lit streets as soldiers assaulted the skies in celebration. “What’s going on?” I asked. “I don’t know,” he replied. “Maybe Saddam’s been overthrown?” Back at the hotel we saw the TV broadcasting pictures of Iraqi soldiers marching into Kuwait City. Saddam claimed he was taking back sovereign Iraqi territory. It’s true that the Anglo-Ottoman convention of 1913 carved out a space that later became Kuwait, but this was well before Iraq became independent in 1932. More likely, he was tempted by the chance to wipe out a \$14bn debt he owed the Kuwaitis—and to control 21 per cent of the world’s oil reserves. Or perhaps after his bloody stalemate with Iran, he wanted a little ego-boosting war. He saw little risk. After all, his gassing to death of 5,000 Kurds at Halabja in 1988 prompted no response from the west. A Foreign Office briefing said, “Punitive measures... would damage British interests to no avail.”

My mother, Yasmin Rahim, tells me what happened next. “We knew we needed to get out of the country as

soon as possible,” she says. The airports were shut so we, along with the other members of our tourist group, hired a bus to drive us to the safety of Amman 600km away. Since most of the army was in Kuwait, the Iraq-Jordan border was poorly patrolled. During the eight-hour journey my 13-year-old sister, Ruhi, caught a stomach bug from a disgusting roadside toilet. The bus paused to let her vomit by the road. “I was more worried about my sickness than I was about getting through safely,” Ruhi tells me now. Naturally concerned for their daughter’s health, my parents were also worried about the delay: time was running out.

We were stopped at the border crossing and Iraqi guards demanded to see our papers. At the time, my mother had dual Kenyan-British nationality, but had decided at the last minute to travel on her UK passport. Others in our group had Tanzanian citizenship even though they were resident in England. A young couple were split up—the husband told to get off, while his wife was forced to stay behind. The bus, now filled only with US and UK citizens, was turned back towards Baghdad.

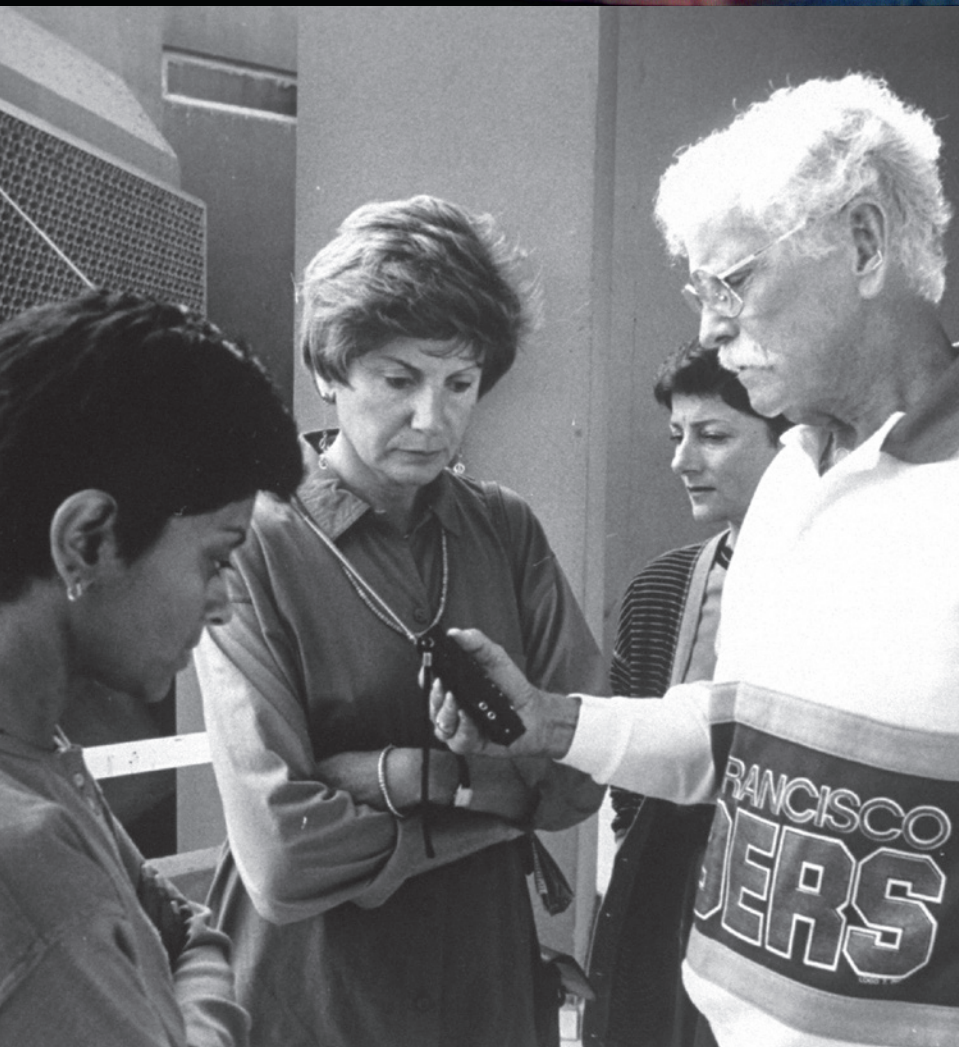
Back at the hotel our passports were taken away. Anxious for real news, we plugged in my sister’s silver tape recorder which was also a radio. After some fiddling my father tuned it to the World Service. It turned out that we were at the centre of a major international incident. President Bush had described Saddam’s invasion as an “outrageous and brutal act of aggression.” He warned that defending Saudi Arabia, potentially in Saddam’s sights, was “of vital interest to the United States.” Bush’s line in the sand would eventually lead to a huge deployment of US soldiers on Saudi soil. (These troops would enrage an obscure militant called Osama bin Laden and serve as a pretext for 9/11.) But Bush seemed much less sure what to do about the western citizens detained in Iraq. “I want to see them out of there, obviously,” he said. “But what he does, that’s a bit unpredictable.”

On 8th August, we were transferred to the grand Al-Mansour Melia hotel on the banks of the River Tigris. “Hostages do not stay at hotels, drink beer and enjoy their lives,” said Tariq Aziz, Iraq’s deputy prime minister. Superficially, he had a point. Early on there was an almost party atmosphere among the British contingent, mainly made up of BA cabin crew and expats. We were allowed out of our rooms three times a day for breakfast, lunch and dinner—plus time in the swimming pool mid-morning. But the atmosphere was surreally sinister. Saddam’s spies stalked the pool, conspicuously speaking into walkie-talkies wrapped in newspapers. These pool visits soon ceased: I later learned we were being photographed for propaganda purposes.

The Rahims were given two rooms facing each other. For reassurance, my father stayed with me and my mother with my sister. At the lifts about half-a-dozen guards sat round playing cards and smoking. Aside from mealtimes we were not allowed to leave our wing. Our lives became restricted to a few square feet of carpet space. How did I fill the time? I read my five or six ▶



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Hillingdon family's Gulf nightmare



● Dr Saddam Rahim with his children Sameer, left, and Ruhl

96/124

Baghdad ordeal is at an end

TENSE negotiations are going on to free more than 1,300 British hostages still held in troubled Iraq. Last week a Hillingdon man, with first hand experience of the trauma many are still suffering, returned home. Reporter JO FRANCIS talked to him.

Although desperate to return home to his family, Dr Rahim, a physicist held hostage in Baghdad, offered to give up his place to one of the sick men held with him.

Speaking at his home in Hatfield Road, Uxbridge, Dr Rahim, a lecturer at a London College, spoke of the family holiday which turned into a nightmare after the outbreak of trouble in the country.

On July 28, together with his wife Yasmin and children Ruhl, 14, and Sameer, nine, and a party of 30 other pilgrims, he set off on an annual religious journey to Iraq.

A few days before the end of the two week stay they heard the airport had been closed and nobody could leave the country.

They managed to hire a coach and, in horrendous conditions, tried to escape across the desert into Jordan.

The frightened family was forced to turn back – and face another grueling desert crossing.

On reaching Baghdad they were immediately taken prisoner and held in the Al Mansour Meisa hotel.

Only allowed out for

meals and a short exercise period, they were guarded 24 hours a day.

"I can still hear the shouts of the guards as they called us for meals," said Dr Rahim, who is still being treated by his doctor for stress after the ordeal.

The family were imprisoned for one month. Mrs Rahim described the great difficulty of keeping her children occupied and showed a folded paper game made out of the hotel note-paper.

She said they prayed a lot and, as they had the Koran and one or two Islamic books, it gave them an opportunity to teach the children more about the faith.

Dr Rahim said he kept up to date on the situation by listening to the BBC

World Service on a radio he managed to keep hidden from the guards.

When the ruling finally came that women and children could go, Mrs Rahim said, although it was a relief, she felt dreadful leaving her husband.

"I was weeping and devastated knowing he would now be alone without the support and company of the family."

Shortly after their families' departure the men were released from the hotel, but were still not allowed to leave the country.

Dr Rahim said life in Baghdad appeared almost normal.

"We were well looked after by the British Embassy. Food and medical care was excellent," he said.

He added when Yusuf Is-

lem visited, there were eight remaining in his party, and 40 others, some very sick.

He said the hostages were puzzled and dismayed when Saddam Hussein seemed to select just four names at random for release.

"I have no idea whatsoever why I was chosen – I knew there were men there seriously ill."

"One man had a serious heart condition and another had terminal cancer. I offered to change with one of them but was not allowed."

Dr Rahim said his personal belief was Hussein would then hopefully release the remaining hostages.

"The people held hostage there are in despair."

"I myself feel I have lost three months of my life. There must be more dialogue – the last thing we want is war."

books over and over again. (Every frame of *Asterix and Cleopatra* is burned into my memory.) Using the hotel notepaper, my sister and I played the fortune-telling game chatterbox.

The corridor became our play area. We played cops and robbers, diving in and out of each other's rooms, nabbing villains. When I returned sweating from my exertions, I would be told off by my mother. She now tells me she was in a "constant panic and a state of flux": if you didn't see someone for five minutes, you didn't know if they had been disappeared. One time, I got impatient with the lift taking us to lunch—a meagre buffet with mouldy bread and gristly meat: the meals had started fine and got worse—and skipped down the stairs on my own. For that my mother made me cry hot tears of rage. Everyone was anxious. My father took up smoking again until Ruhi shamed him into stopping: "I told him that would mean Saddam was winning."

"The Iraqis working at the hotel were much more gracious than the contemptuous guards"

Every day a badly written English newspaper was pushed under our doors telling us how superbly Saddam was bestriding the world stage. The BBC told a different story. Listening surreptitiously on Ruhi's radio, we heard that Saddam was throwing out panicky gambits to row back from what had clearly been an enormous blunder. He offered to withdraw from Kuwait if Israel pulled out of the Palestinian territories. When that was rebuffed, Saddam fell back on talk of the invading crusaders and reviving the prestige of the Arab-Islamic world. The British and American governments said they wouldn't negotiate with Iraq. We would remain in limbo.

From sober truth we turned to the lurid lies of Iraqi television. Between the Hollywood films on repeat (western cultural imperialism was fine, it seemed) there were some bizarre transmissions. Camera crews were sent to the camps near the power stations, ports, dams and factories to where less fortunate detainees had been taken. Perhaps I dreamed this but I think an English couple actually got married in one camp. When asked if they would return to Iraq, they replied: "Oh yes, we'd love to come back!" Whether the target audience of one—initials SH—believed what he was seeing or simply enjoyed humiliating westerners, remains unclear to me. The reality of life in those camps, described in harrowing detail in Tim Lewis's book *The Human Shield*, was quite different. British detainees were horribly ill-treated. Some suffered mock executions. Others were beaten. Both men and women were raped. For us their trauma was always at the edge of the frame.

Our parents told us to never call ourselves hostages and never to speak ill of the guards—or even speak to them. The rules applied inside and outside our rooms: they could be bugged. My sister and I searched like the

intrepid Famous Five (I had an Enid Blyton with me) for these listening devices. We settled on a silver nail hammered into the mirror frame. Looking back, it was just a nail; but our parents indulged us if that meant we would keep schtum. Saddam's name was verboten so my sister came up with the nickname "Freddie." Freddie because he had a moustache like Freddie Mercury, and because, like Freddy Kruger from *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, he might murder you in bed.

The Iraqis working at the hotel were much more gracious than the contemptuous guards. At dinner we were served coffee by a waitress with big hair and high heels. She was once harassed by a man in our group—something as pathetic as "do you come with dessert as well?" She flashed a fake smile and walked away. The poor woman didn't want to be there either. Despite the language barrier, my mother Yasmin struck up a friendship with the middle-aged ladies who cleaned our rooms. She recalls their small acts of kindness. At great risk, they smuggled in basic medicines and creams for us in the voluminous front pockets of their overalls.

British banker Patrick Herbert, who was being held near a fuel dump at Basra airport, told the *Guardian* in 2003 about his strange experience of meeting Saddam. He described "a charisma which normal circumstances you would say was almost great, but was probably an evil charisma." The ever-theatrical Iraqi dictator enjoyed filming his encounters with westerners. In one notorious instance, he ruffled the hair of five-year-old Stuart Lockwood, while his family looked on. "Does Stuart get his milk?" asked Saddam, wearing a smart grey suit while his guests were in ragged holiday clothes. "Yes," Stuart's father replied. "Cornflakes too?" The reply was again, yes. Saddam added bitterly that Iraqis didn't get cornflakes with milk. He could move from the jovial to the sinister in moments. This would make a great experience for their diaries, he suggested to his audience, then adding that if war came, he would smash his enemies. His only truthful sentence was inadvertent: "We will treat you in the same way we treat people in Iraq."

Watching the performance on Iraqi TV, we felt the Lockwoods had been lucky to be allowed to petition in person. My father, Sadiq, started to plot an audience with the dictator. Saddam seemed sympathetic to children. But we needed some kind of party trick. So I was sent to the lady three doors down, a fellow British Muslim who knew Arabic, to be intensively taught how to recite the Qur'an. That way I would be able to perform our Muslimness to Saddam.

In the end that didn't happen. There was no Sameer Rahim dressed in a white dish-dash and skullcap reciting to the smiling moustache; there was no dramatic reading of Qur'anic verses emphasising mercy and manumission. But I have dreamt that scene many times over the years.

At the end of August, it was announced that women and children would be released. Saddam was being increasingly challenged during his "guest interviews" by mothers asking why their children were not allowed ▶

Framing the truth: Saddam with five-year-old Stuart Lockwood; hostages at the al-Mansur Melia Hotel listening to the radio; and an interview with Sadiq Rahim, with Sameer and Ruhi, on his return to London

back to school. Thatcher told him he could not hide “behind the skirts of women and children”—a line designed to prick his patriarchal Arab pride. I insisted that I wouldn’t leave my father. He replied it was my duty to look after my mother and sister. I remember nothing of our parting except staring blankly out of the bus window. We were taken to another hotel ready for our flight to Paris and then London. That evening we decided to return to the al-Mansour Melia for one final goodbye. We told the guards we had forgotten some clothes. Upstairs, I vividly remember my mother and father embracing with tearful sobs, finally unable to hide their emotions. On his shelf, my mother tells me, he had placed one of our fortune-telling chatterboxes.

Back in London things looked slightly more optimistic. The men we had left behind were moved out of the al-Mansour Melia and given more freedom to move around. Then we heard Thatcher’s interview with David Frost on 2nd September: the PM said if any hostages were harmed the culprits would be prosecuted for “their totally uncivilised and brutal behaviour.” Far from being buoyed by her strong line, we were terrified it would only make things worse. We were right to be worried: Iraqi radio responded by denouncing Thatcher as a “grey-haired old woman... mentally unbalanced... with a canine harsh voice.”

In the absence of government negotiation, various ad-hoc diplomatic missions got going. Each set of detainees seemed to have their own celebrity diplomat. Former politicians, including Edward Heath, Jesse Jackson and Willy Brandt, flew to Iraq to plead for the remaining men. Each one duly returned with a cohort of the detained—it was the price Saddam paid for the legitimising photo shoots he craved. Dictators’ egos can be surprisingly easily manipulated.

British Muslims got our own champion who combined the right amount of cultural and religious capital. That man was Yusuf Islam, previously known as Cat Stevens—yes, my father’s fate would depend on the man who sang *Morning Has Broken* and *Peace Train*. After converting to Islam in 1979, Stevens became a prominent figure in the British Muslim community, running schools in west London. Cannily, in advance of his trip to Iraq, he referred to the Iraqi leader as a “congenial fellow and brother Muslim.” He flew out in October taking our hopes with him.

Meanwhile we waited. My mother Yasmin was relentless in campaigning for her husband’s release, phoning anyone she thought might help. Somehow she managed to arrange a couple of phone calls directly with him. Hearing his voice was both reassuring and scary. Then in mid-October we got good news: Yusuf Islam’s efforts had been successful and, along with four other British Muslims, Sadiq Rahim would be shortly released.

My father was one of the first men to come home and we became the object of media attention. ITN came to our house to interview my mother. Trained to be careful with her words, she stayed studiously neutral on the Saddam regime, and instead expressed hope that he would be home soon. Us kids needed to be filmed doing something, apparently. Yasmin told us to make posters that read: “Welcome Home Daddy! Thank You Saddam Hussein.” Ruhi was furious we were appeasing the dictator, although

she is now more understanding of this position. Still, she resents the patronising way the news reported on our posters: “It’s like they didn’t think we knew Saddam was a bad guy, and our mum was just trying to play it safe.”

We went to Heathrow to greet our father along with a huge number of reporters and photographers, who instructed us to not rush towards him so they could get a clean picture—the final framing shot of the story. My mother ignored them and burst through as soon as she saw him. The first thing I noticed was that he had a Union Jack sticker on his shirt pocket.

Why had he been released sooner than others? “I have no idea whatsoever why I was chosen,” Sadiq told our local newspaper, the *Uxbridge Gazette*. “I knew there were men there seriously ill... I offered to change with one of them but was not allowed.” He showed the reporter the fortune-telling chatterbox he had brought home. He ended by calling for more dialogue. “The last thing we want is war.”

But war there would be. Operation Desert Storm began on 17th January. Victory was swift for the Allies but Saddam was left in charge. After expelling him from Kuwait, Bush told the Shia to take matters into their own hands. Their uprising was crushed mercilessly. Ayatollah al-Khoei was arrested and forced to appear on television with Saddam. Two of his sons were killed.

Twelve years later there was another war, ironically not at Saddam’s instigation, that would lead to his overthrow. Some of the other former detainees were understandably keen to see justice done. But my mother and I marched against the war together. I suppose we didn’t see why Iraqis needed to suffer any more for their ruler’s sins. Just a month or so after Baghdad fell, our friend Majid al-Khoei, one of the ayatollah’s sur-

viving sons, returned to his homeland. In April 2003, he was hacked to death by a mob instigated by a rival Shia group. In a traumatised country, blood would have blood.

Back in 1990 ordinary life resumed—with minor after-tremors. At school, I started losing my temper and got into fights. Ruhi, now a headteacher, tells me that “when a pupil’s grandparent passes away or even if the dog dies,” they are offered counselling. But in those days we just got on with it. We rarely talked about it as a family; it seemed an odd interlude, a rupture that was easily repaired—perhaps too easily.

Our only reminders were the periodic updates from the UN, which was pursuing compensation from the Iraqi government. Saddam, naturally, resisted this demand from his ungrateful guests. Eventually a cheque came in the post—something like \$60,000 for my father and smaller amounts for us. (Saddam Hussein helped me buy a second-hand Fiat Punto.) By the time the money came through, though, my father Sadiq couldn’t feel any satisfaction. He had died in 2000 at the age of 55. I never talked to him about his experiences alone in Baghdad. But my mother tells me the first thing he did when he returned to London was to spend a day riding the bus round our suburban streets. Call it the banality of freedom. **P**

Sameer Rahim is Prospect’s Managing Editor. His novel “Asghar and Zahra” (JM Originals) was longlisted for the Desmond Elliott Prize



Passport home: Sadiq Rahim was released in October 1990

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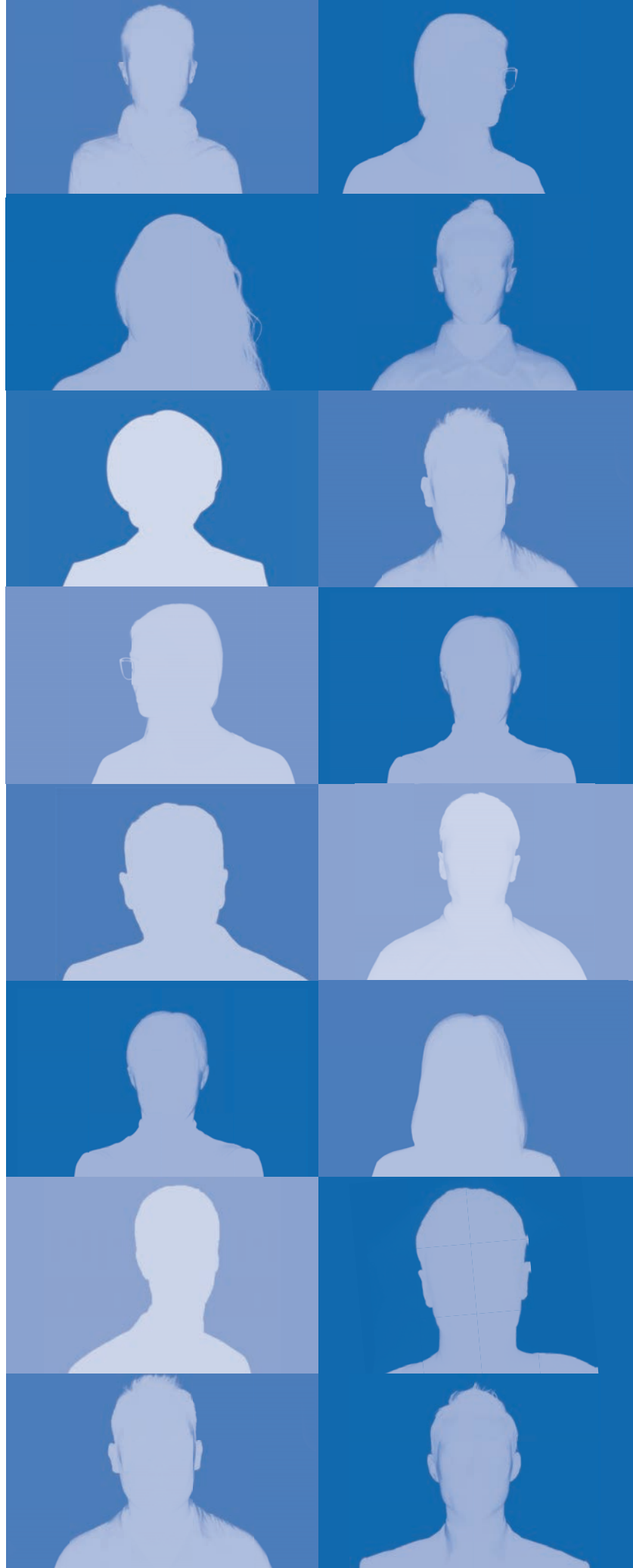
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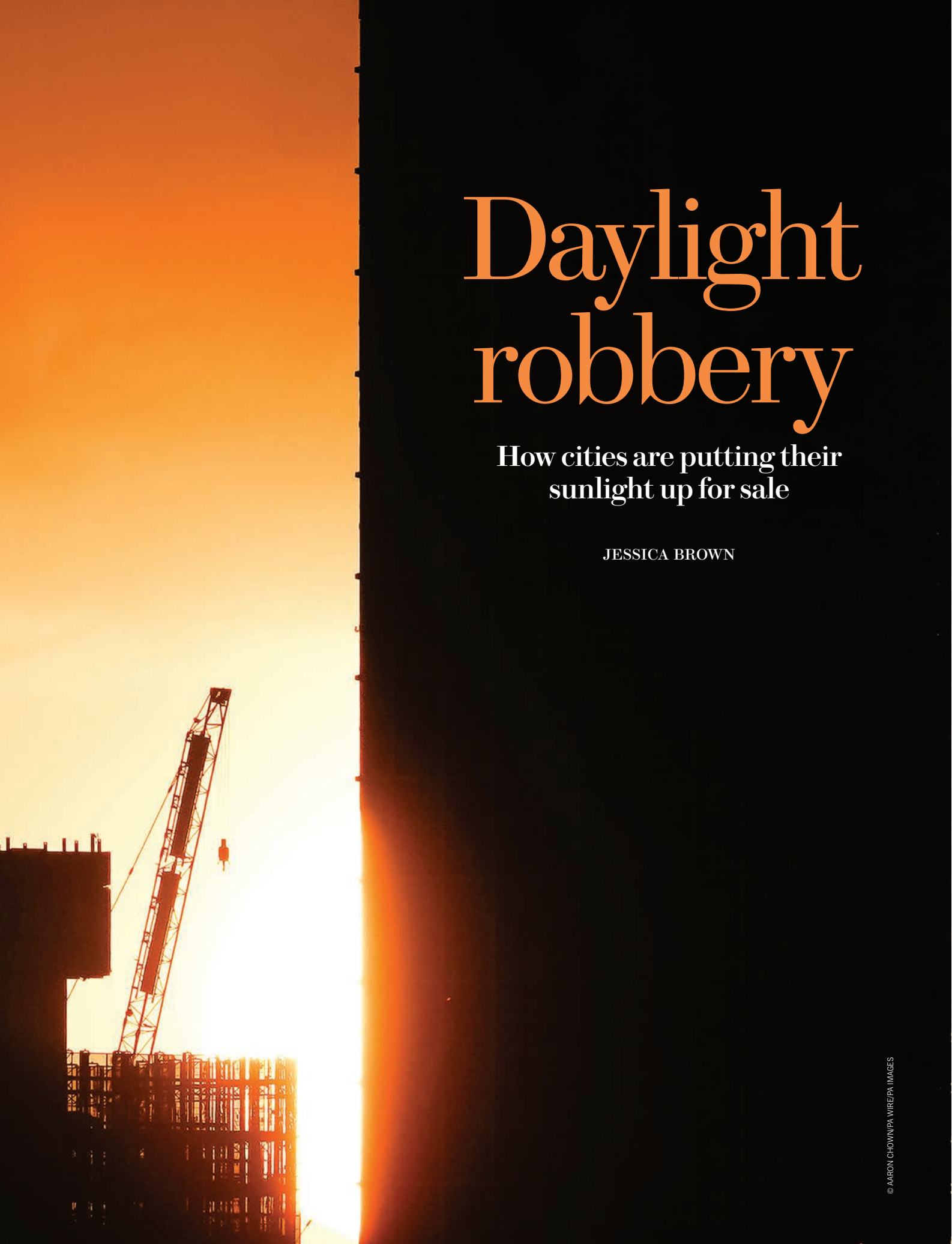
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Daylight robbery

How cities are putting their
sunlight up for sale

JESSICA BROWN

Michael Ball had been renting a flat on Albert Embankment on the south bank of the Thames for six years before his view became blocked by a behemoth of a building site in 1999. On the former site of a less intrusive 1930s government building, the development eventually turned into a curved, 14-storey, glass-and-steel luxury apartment building called Parliament View in autumn 2001.

The shadow the development would cast across the flat didn't cross Ball's mind—until it was too late. He was working from home when the building was completed, and suddenly found that he had to keep his lights on all day. He quickly became sluggish and tired, and stopped socialising. "I got very depressed. Depression is a strange thing—you don't know what's happening to you." He felt, he remembers, "a sense of desperation as this cloud gradually engulfed me."

Ball cycled and swam, and tried to keep busy with work, but nothing alleviated his mood. "All of these strategies were failing to stop the engulfing cycle of emptiness, lethargy, hibernation, all of which feed upon themselves as you gradually spiral down, pulling the bedclothes further and further over your head." Ball moved out of the flat when Parliament View turned one year old—and has been campaigning for the "right to light" ever since.

We all need daylight, as is made apparent every year when early sunsets trigger seasonal affective disorder. For millions, the days of winter are dark in more sense than one. Regular access to daylight is, says therapist Rakhi Chand, among the most vital factors affecting mental health. It is one of those areas where there is no clear line between its physical and psychological impacts. As well as being important in the production of Vitamin D, daylight plays a key part in regulating sleep that is, in turn, essential for all sorts of things. "Our natural body clock relies on easy access to light," Chand explains, "and if our access is limited it can affect our sleep pattern." Our body does repair and growth work while we sleep, and regulates mood and stress hormones serotonin and cortisol, and so if you deprive someone of daylight, you play havoc with all of this. Therapists such as Chand therefore advise everyone to be proactive in getting plenty of natural light.

But modern metropolises aren't always run in ways that make that easy. Last year, it emerged that a 120-square-metre advertising hoarding plastered on a Dalston apartment block had been shunting some of the working-class residents of the fast-gentrifying area into the dark. At the time of that mini-scandal (which ended in the hoarding coming down) the billboard was showing an iPhone ad. This seems fitting since much has been made of the modern world's incompatibility with our biological wiring, and the artificial light of smartphones is commonly held up as the worst culprit, keeping our brains in an abnormal state of distraction. But there's another less-discussed side to this modern malaise: the rising threat to natural light.

Cities are at the heart of this story. The past few decades have seen them grow larger and larger. By 2050, the UN estimates that more than two thirds of the global population will live in one. And, at least in wealthy economies like Britain, this has been regarded as a good news story; amid much anguishing about "left-behind" English towns, the big cities are regarded as vibrant, energetic, diverse and resurgent.

But as urban populations grow, there is a scramble to provide housing on exorbitantly expensive land, which is often

resolved with a single answer: building upwards, and not worrying about the giant shadows cast. At the top of the new towers there may be spectacular penthouses, rich with light and air, but not so much in the many dwellings below. Light is becoming a commodity that only the most well-off can afford.

Take London. The number of people living in the metropolis grew from less than seven million to nine million between 1988 and 2020. Pressure on housing has resulted, and in response, both central government and City Hall have imposed targets and dangled incentives for councils to build new homes. Town halls are rewarded for building more—for example, Tower Hamlets was awarded £21.9m for greenlighting more homes than any other British council in the last 12 months. Meanwhile, those who fail to meet targets feel the strain. London Mayor Sadiq Khan is himself under attack for only building at half the rate that he had previously said was necessary.

All this pressure results in one thing: taller, potentially daylight-blocking buildings. The trend is clear to anyone glancing at the London skyline. In 2018, a record 115 schemes for tall buildings were under construction across London, after a 12 per cent increase of tall buildings in the pipeline from 2016 to 2017. The LSE's local governance expert, Tony Travers, says that both individual councils and the mayor's office are almost bound to push through more and more tall buildings in the years ahead.

The pressure to build up is particularly felt in the inner city—and by the poor. Barking and Dagenham, nine miles out from central London, had just over 4,800 families on the waiting list for low-rent social housing in 2019; the waiting list in Tower Hamlets on the edge of the City, by contrast, is almost four times as long. Kingston upon Thames, 10 miles from Charing Cross, had 1,700 families waiting, while more central Lambeth had just over 25,000.

With land extortionately priced, tall buildings might appear to be the only answer. Councils have infamously tight budgets: the only way they can afford to build "social" or so-called "affordable" (in reality merely discounted) housing is to approve big private developments and use them to cross-subsidise the effort. But seeking to relieve one set of cash-strapped families this way has a tragically ironic consequence: blocking out light for many others in nearby homes.

Although he has long since escaped the darkness cast by Parliament View, Ball recently became involved in a campaign to stop 8 Albert Embankment, a site just south of the Thames which is home to the old Fire Brigade headquarters, and close to where he used to live. Billed by its developers as "A Place For All," the 8 Albert Embankment plans promise 400 homes, a giant hotel as well as a modernised fire station and fire service museum, but also involve a 26-storey and a 24-storey tower block, along with three 10-11 storey buildings. In December 2019, while campaigning on behalf of affected residents, Ball watched history repeat itself as Lambeth Council's planning committee voted through the plans. "For the first time... I interrupted a council meeting. I got so upset. I shouted: 'Don't do it—don't inflict this on people again!'"

After the proposal was approved, the ball then passed to Khan, who has the right to review large developments, and give the "final" yes or no. Or so everyone thought. But in the Kafkaesque way of public authorities, things got more complicated. Khan recused himself because of his interest in running London's fire services, and so the veto passed into the hands of his ►



The Albert Embankment in the early 2000s. Like in many other parts of London, the Embankment has seen a proliferation of new high-rise buildings in the past two decades, often “shading out” those who live around and beneath them

deputy, Jules Pipe, who declined to wield it. But then there was another twist in June, when the housing secretary Robert Jenrick “called in” the scheme for review, and launched a local inquiry. He had received over 200 requests to review it, including one from the Twentieth Century Society, worried about the effect on EP Wheeler’s Grade-II listed 1930s Fire Brigade HQ. Jenrick has since being caught up in a political storm about greenlighting another large inner-London development that benefits a Conservative donor, and his attention may be distracted as the process grinds on. Although the impetus for this inquiry was the historic environment as opposed to the question of daylight, everything can be looked at afresh, offering a glimmer in the darkness for those campaigning against the scheme.

Despite his own experiences 20 years ago, Ball counts himself lucky compared to those living near 8 Albert Embankment, who can’t move out easily because they are social tenants. If they up sticks they can find themselves back on that long waiting list, or otherwise trying their luck in the punishingly insecure private sector, where capped benefits frequently no longer cover the eye-watering rents. They can only apply for new social housing in their borough if they can somehow “prove” their home doesn’t meet their needs. Moving between boroughs automatically means going back to the back of the queue.

If the building goes ahead, the tenants living on the ground floor of nearby five-storey Whitgift House (among them 12 children) stand to lose much of the daylight they currently get through their windows. It is the difference between an average day in July and one in March, says Paul Littlefair, an expert who has been researching and consulting on light for 40 years, and the man who wrote the internationally-recognised guidelines of the Building Research Establishment (BRE), a centre that offers expertise on standards in design and construction.

Abdi Hassan has lived with his wife in Whitgift House for almost 15 years, these days with six children, after they fled the civil war in Somalia. The flat is already dark. During a string of bright, sunny January days in London earlier this year, it got only around two hours of natural light each day. “In winter, we suffer a lot,” he says. “It affects our health. My wife has a vitamin D deficiency. In summer she can sit in the garden, but”—he fears—“the development will cover our garden from sunlight.”

Those pushing new luxury developments have taken to stressing their role in supporting affordable housing. The proportion of cheaper homes in the mix can be used as a bargaining chip in seeking planning approval, with desperate councils having to compromise in ways that sell their ambitions short. For example, at 8 Albert Embankment, 40 per cent of the housing is set to be “affordable,” rather than the 50 per cent that Lambeth says it will aim for across the borough, and is supposed to be asked of sites on publicly owned land, such as in this case. The proportion of affordable homes in the mix is not the only compromise made with the ambitions of Lambeth’s “Local Plan,” which also suggests that the light available in new buildings and the areas around them will be carefully considered.

Jerrand Brown has lived on the ground floor of Whitgift House for 12 years with his three children, one of whom is disabled. He’s worried about the impact on his home—and is disappointed by the council’s response. “Us council tenants don’t get to choose where we live and we don’t have the money to move. We thought you’d protect us with the Lambeth plan,” he told the council’s planning committee at the December meeting.

While making the case for planning permission, 8 Albert Embankment’s developers hired surveyors Point 2 to report on the development’s potential impact on existing daylight levels in nearby buildings. (On its website, Point 2 boasts of “devising dynamic, imaginative and bespoke strategies to unlock the development potential of a site” and “design solutions that seek to reduce Rights of Light risks wherever possible.”) Point 2’s report concluded that the development would offer neighbours “daylight and sunlight levels that are typical of a dense urban location located within a Central Activity Zone.”

Lambeth Council then hired a chartered building surveyor, Schroeders Begg, to independently review the findings. It found that residents in Whitgift House face a drop in vertical sky component (VSC)—a measure of light in a home based on the amount of sky visible from a given point—from an average 27 per cent to 20 per cent. Nearly half of residents would drop to 16 per cent. (Those BRE guidelines—which Lambeth’s local plan pledges to use—suggest a minimum VSC of 27 per cent.) Nevertheless Schroeders Begg concluded that “for an urban scheme of this nature, we consider the adversity impact could be considered acceptable.” In their report, the surveyors pointed out that the development is “within an urban site,” and suggested “it is inevitable for such a site, there will be flexible departures from the ‘default criteria.’” All this seems to echo the Mayor of London’s 2016 “implementation framework,” issued under Boris Johnson, which called for an “appropriate degree of flexibility” in applying the BRE guidelines, especially in the context of “higher density development.”

“Without outside expertise, it’s almost impossible even for locals to understand what they’re up against, still less to resist”

Yet Littlefair stated at the Lambeth planning meeting that the BRE guidelines aren’t based on any particular context, urban or rural—and he should know, after all. This wasn’t, however, enough to convince the council to reject the plans.

Without outside expertise, it’s almost impossible for locals to understand what they’re up against, still less to resist. But Whitgift House residents were fortunate in having the help of other—more affluent—locals, who were able to commission Littlefair to analyse Lambeth Council’s outsourced daylight analysis. This enabled them to put up a fight. But ultimately, councils have no statutory obligation to follow the BRE guidelines. As a Lambeth Council spokesperson told me: “Planning legislation allows for departures from adopted Local Development plan policy provided there are enough factors to justify it.”

And town halls in London will always have many reasons—good and bad—to justify building up. Even when they withstand them all and do refuse permission, it can be followed by a loss on appeal. Last year, Lambeth Council lost a costly battle against its refusal to allow a development on nearby Graphite Square, on the specific grounds that it would cast a shadow over neighbouring homes. After this painful lesson, the council doesn’t want to risk making the same mistake again: the Graphite Square appeal was referenced throughout the application process of 8 Albert Embankment as an example of how much loss of light ►

High-rise buildings along Albert Embankment in 2019. With land expensive, developers in big cities have offered a single solution: build up



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developers can get away with; the Schroeders Begg analysis stated explicitly: “Many neighbouring properties impacted... would still meet the alternative target criteria set within the Graphite Square Appeal.”

While the council and developers scrambled to justify the 8 Albert Embankment development, local residents felt they had little opportunity to make their voices count. The planning committee’s vote in favour of the development left them despondent for their own situation and how this would contribute to further loss of light in the future. Christopher Woodward, director of the nearby Garden Museum, sadly reflects that “London has put the sky up for sale.”

The example of 8 Albert Embankment—and of Graphite Square—shows that a blind is being ratcheted down on city-dwellers’ daylight. Developers hire surveyors to argue for lowered standards; councils call in independent reviewers, who consider many points of view including those of the initial surveyors; councils—desperate to build homes, and haunted by costly appeals—let projects squeak through. Such decisions entrench new and lower standards, which are then invoked to justify lowering them again. Towers shoot up, councils scrape by... and local residents sink into the dark.

The council’s approval of the 8 Albert Embankment site could be used to lower the benchmark for a “Kennington Stage” development nearby, where locals are campaigning against plans to build a 29-storey block that will reduce their light by up to 40 per cent VSC. The planning application has received more than 450 objections and just nine supporting comments.

“When we saw an artist’s impression of the tower block, we were all shaken rigid,” says Tony Millson, who is retired and

lives directly adjacent to the site. “I had sleepless nights thinking about what might happen. The tower will cast a shadow over us, literally and metaphorically.”

The argument put forward by Point 2—which has again been hired by the developers Anthology to survey daylight levels—in this case is audacious. The report contends that residents around the Kennington development have enjoyed better levels of daylight than in many dense areas of London: “The majority of the existing levels of daylight and sunlight within the surrounding residential properties looking over the site are very high and more akin to what one would expect in a village environment.” The implicit logic is that erecting a building that would plunge locals under the sort of shadows that already befall much of the rest of the city would constitute some sort of an egalitarian step.

Official policy only emboldens such arguments. It is after citing a 2017 Whitehall housing white paper—which outlines the government’s intention to address “the need for flexibility in relation to daylight and housing targets” in high-density areas—that Point 2’s report continues: “New developments are being planned, approved, constructed, and sold with an increasingly flexible approach to daylight.”

Challenging a bureaucracy that is already on a set course is rarely easy, and Caroline DeLaney, head of real estate disputes at the law firm Rosenblatt, observes that the formidable task of fighting back is made tougher by the screeds of technical analysis produced by hired outside parties: “If a council wants a scheme to go ahead, they can always come up with reasons to depart from [their own] local plans,” says DeLaney. Light is a consideration, but councils “can also pull in other factors they consider relevant, so it’s a lottery what the outcome will be.”

Light isn't just disappearing in London, of course. People in cities around the world are battling for it—and losing it. Researchers from New York University have found that most neighbourhoods in Manhattan are covered in shadow for at least half of the day, despite New York City having long considered light in its zoning laws.

Nor are tower blocks the only issue. When recently announcing “the most radical reforms of our planning system since the end of the Second World War”—to come into effect this winter—Boris Johnson revealed that a wide range of commercial buildings and empty shops will be able to convert their properties into housing blocks without applying for planning permission. Critics fear that this will allow developers to build more—increasingly cramped—homes with insufficient natural light. Existing housing blocks, moreover, will be able to build two additional storeys without needing permission. DeLaney calls it “a problem waiting to happen.”

Public policy, however, is not doomed to fail. Since 1993, all residential buildings in China must receive at least two hours of sunshine a day in winter to receive planning permission. That might not sound like much, but it has had a huge impact on the space developers have been forced to leave between apartment buildings.

Daniel Safarik, editor-in-chief of the non-profit Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat, says this is connected to the Chinese value of feng shui, which puts emphasis on natural light. “In China there are rows upon rows of seemingly identical buildings lined up at what seems to be a weird angle, slightly staggered so each building doesn't completely interfere with others' access to daylight,” he says.

“New developments are being planned, approved, constructed and sold with an increasingly flexible approach to daylight”

And back in the UK there has also been some innovative design. In 2015, architecture firm NBBJ developed plans for two towers in London that would bounce light between them to create a pattern on the ground below where there would otherwise be shadow. Architect Christian Coop, who developed the plans, says his project was never intended to be built, but it inspired a building in New York that uses light in a similar way. Having incubated the idea, perhaps London could use it.

Other London architects are extolling the benefits of low-rise developments. Property developer the Berkeley Group has proposed a village-like community in Greenwich, where residents will receive daylight levels that “exceed those required by the latest British standards.” However, adopting this at scale would be difficult because land is scarce and pricey, not to mention parcelled into small sites owned by lots of different people. And in central London, huge swaths of land are owned by public bodies, including the Greater London Authority, Crown Estate, London Fire Brigade and Transport for London.

Meanwhile, the City of London, dominated by commercial real estate rather than homes, has come up with a curious answer of sorts: rooftop gardens. The City has set aside a num-

ber of free “sky gardens” with a view to making sunlight accessible. Twelve more are being negotiated or constructed.

“The highlight of my planning career was the opening of the roof terrace at 120 Fenchurch Street,” Gwyn Richards, interim chief planning officer for the City of London Corporation, said. “I went up on a Sunday and a whole extended Bangladeshi family, around 12 of them, from the baby to the grandmother, were going up there with a picnic as they would've done in a park.” But rooftop gardens are no panacea when we're fated to spend a lot of time inside, especially when there are obstacles in using them. The garden atop London's “Walkie Talkie” skyscraper has received criticism for its restrictions—members of the public have to book far in advance to enjoy an allotted hour.

Back at Whitgift House in Lambeth, residents who have felt ignored throughout the planning process now have a flicker of hope from the local inquiry called by Whitehall. But little in the wider story encourages optimism—at least, not just yet.

Looking ahead, however, it becomes possible to imagine a brighter future. As rents rise and lives get more hectic, the stam-pede to move into the city—the root of the problem—could gradually go into reverse. Last year it was reported that more people were moving out of London than ever before, partly due to the rising cost of living. That was before the Covid-19 pandemic, which has forced more to flee the city, and to re-evaluate whether they really want to remain chained to a shadowland that seems to be taking more and more of our earnings, sanity—and light. **P**

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Titan of the west

As the Atlantic alliance that Ernest Bevin helped to forge 70 years ago finally begins to fray, a new biography recounts his remarkable journey from dogsbody and delivery boy to world-shaping statesman

CHRIS MULLIN



Winston Churchill and Clement Attlee are rightly recognised as giants of 20th-century British politics. Nye Bevan, too, gets a look-in for his role in founding the NHS. One name, however, is often overlooked: Ernest Bevin. In some respects, he was the most remarkable of them all.

To the extent he is remembered now, it is for having been foreign secretary at that critical post-war moment when the political map of the world was being redrawn, and Britain was coping with the painful realisation that it was no longer a world power of the first rank. But there was much more to him than that. Bevin was a dominant figure in the labour movement from the late 1920s onwards. Without him, Attlee might never have become Labour leader and, even if he had done so, would not have survived long enough to become, arguably, our most successful peacetime prime minister. As Minister of Labour in Churchill's war cabinet Bevin, more than anyone, helped to mobilise the workforce onto a war footing and to establish a broad social settlement between workers and employers that endured for more than 30 years.

But after a couple of decades in which every prime minister, from John Major to Boris Johnson, has claimed to make "social mobility" their cause, there is something else that makes the recent neglect of Bevin more striking. In contrast to the likes of Churchill and to some extent Attlee, who came from privileged backgrounds, Bevin was born into West Country penury in a remote Somerset village. He was the seventh child of a penniless single mother who died of cancer when he was eight, leaving him to be brought up by a half-sister in north Devon. In later life, he recalled having to read aloud from newspapers for members of the family who were illiterate. Aged 11, he left school to work as a farm labourer. Aged 13 he made his way to Bristol where he lodged with an elder brother and found work as a dogsbody in a restaurant, for six shillings a week plus meals. Later on, he drove a horse and cart around the city; one of his jobs was delivering mineral water to the homes of the prosperous. Many years later, at the Foreign Office, on learning that the family of his principal private secretary's wife came from Bristol, he inquired as to the precise address. "Ah yes," he said, "I know the house. I used to deliver the laundry."

His education continued at non-conformist Sunday schools and later at evening classes run by the Workers' Education Association. Baptised aged 20, Bevin became a tub-thumping local preacher. "Chapel was to Bevin," says Andrew Adonis in his new biography, "what Sandhurst was to Churchill." It gave him self-confidence and social standing. Although by the age of 40 his personal faith had lapsed, he remained a preacher for the rest of his life.

By 1905, aged 24, he was organising Bristol's Right-to-Work Committee, campaigning for a programme of public works to relieve unemployment among the city's rapidly growing army of labourers who had migrated from the surrounding countryside. In 1910 he had a leading role in the Avonmouth Docks strike,

recognising from the outset that effective trade unionism required the creation of a single large union, rather than many smaller ones competing with each other. In due course he was the architect of the Transport and General Workers' Union, founded by an amalgam of 14 smaller outfits, which became the largest trade union in the democratic world. In 1922 Bevin became its first general secretary, an office he held until becoming foreign secretary 23 years later.

By the early 1920s he was a national figure. The event that propelled him to fame was a strike by dock workers in support of a demand for a minimum wage of 16 shillings a day. These were turbulent times. The end of the First World War had been followed by deep recession, mass unemployment and bitter class conflict. The Labour Party was beginning to supplant the bickering Liberal factions of Lloyd George and Asquith, and the ruling class was afraid that the contagion of the Russian revolution might spread to Britain. Rather than reject the 16-shillings-a-day claim outright, the government offered the strikers a court of inquiry presided over by a law lord. Bevin persuaded the strike leaders to accept the offer and then to appoint him the workers' spokesman at the inquiry which was held in a glare of publicity at the Royal Courts of Justice in the Strand.

"Bevin helped establish a broad social settlement between workers and employers that endured for more than 30 years"

Here, a man educated as he later put it, "in the 'edgerows of life," found himself up against some of the smoothest and most expensive barristers in the land—and he ran rings around them. His opening statement, spread over three sessions, lasted 11 hours and attracted widespread praise. His cross-examination of the employers was masterly, and eventually resulted in the court upholding the claim in full. This, says Adonis, was Bevin the pragmatist, willing to work within existing institutions. He could drive a hard bargain, but he was never a revolutionary. On the contrary, the more he learned about communism the more he reviled it, although—as his first biographer, Francis Williams, observed—Bevin possessed "the same peasant shrewdness as Stalin." Astonishing though it is to contemplate, he would one day find himself sitting at the same table as the Soviet tyrant.

By the mid-1930s, as leader of the country's largest trade union, Bevin was inevitably a major player in Labour politics. Following the disaster of Ramsay MacDonald's desertion, the parliamentary party had been reduced to little more than a rump in the election of 1931. At a time when the Nazi threat was becoming increasingly apparent, it was led by George ▶

Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin stands behind Clement Attlee at a meeting of the Big Three (UK, US and USSR) in Potsdam, Germany, in 1945

Lansbury, a vacillating pacifist. It was Bevin who ruthlessly disposed of Lansbury with a devastating speech at the 1935 party conference, in which he accused the Labour leader of “hawking your conscience round from body to body, asking to be told what you ought to do with it.” With an election looming Attlee was installed as interim leader, but after the election, with Bevin’s support, Attlee was re-elected—over the head of Herbert Morrison, who never forgave Bevin. The feeling was mutual. “Herbert’s his own worst enemy,” someone later commented, giving rise to Bevin’s famous response: “Not while I’m alive, he ain’t.”

Many times in the years ahead, even in the immediate aftermath of Attlee’s great triumph in the 1945 election, Bevin would be called on to protect Attlee from the plotting of Morrison and others. Thanks in large part to Bevin, Attlee would go on to become Labour’s longest serving leader.

“Churchill said of Bevin: ‘He is the Labour man I want. He has no defeatist tendencies’”

By now Bevin had formed an alliance with the economist John Maynard Keynes. Some years earlier they had both been members of the Macmillan Commission, which was set up by Ramsay MacDonald’s government to consider the relationship between finance and industry in the wake of the Wall Street Crash and as the Depression took hold. In defiance of what was in those days the received wisdom Keynes, supported by Bevin, proposed the nationalisation of the Bank of England and a programme of public investment to revive the economy and reduce unemployment, but he and Bevin were in a minority. This was the beginning of a partnership that endured until Keynes’s death in 1946, by which time his economic philosophy had triumphed.

In international relations, as well, Bevin often proved to be on the right side of history. Unlike many on the left, he was never under any illusion about the Soviet Union. A good deal of his energies in the 1930s were devoted to resisting the malign influence of Communists in the trade union movement. Adonis writes: “The equation of fascism and communism and the imperative to resist both, was Bevin’s most fundamental and consequential insight.”

Bevin was one of the first public figures to become alert to the menace of Nazism. One of Hitler’s first acts was to destroy the German trade unions, arresting and imprisoning many of their leaders. Bevin, who had visited Germany, was acquainted with many of them and he did not hesitate to speak out. Nor, unlike Churchill, was he under any illusion about Mussolini. When the Italian dictator invaded Abyssinia in 1935 Bevin advocated firm action: it was this crisis that caused him to bring down Lansbury.

Well before Munich, Bevin was warning against appeasement of Hitler. “If ever there was a time, whether it is popular or unpopular, we have got to tell our people the truth, it is now,” he told the 1936 Labour Party conference. With hindsight it is unsurprising that, come the war, he was Churchill’s first choice for minister of labour and national service in the coalition government. “He is the Labour man I want. He has no defeatist tendencies,” said Churchill.



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A seat was found for him in parliament and before long he was a key member of the war cabinet, touring the country urging employers and employees to work together for the war effort. Although he had a range of draconian powers at his disposal, he avoided using them as far as possible, preferring instead to encourage, cajole and conciliate. Some workers, notably farm labourers and miners, received substantial pay rises. Health and safety, collective bargaining and arbitration were enshrined by law. In 1945 he set up a series of wages councils on which employees, employers and the state were represented. They covered about five million people and effectively set a minimum wage in various low-paid occupations.

It was always part of Bevin’s plan to use the exigencies of wartime to lay down a template for industrial relations in the future. “They say that Gladstone was at the Treasury from 1860 to 1930,” he was fond of saying, “I intend to be minister of labour from 1940 until 1990.” He wasn’t far out. Many of the changes to working conditions and industrial relations that he pioneered lasted until the Thatcher government in the 1980s; the final wages councils were abolished in 1993.

Come the end of the war and the Labour landslide of 1945, Bevin was expecting to go to the Treasury, but at the last minute Attlee changed his mind and appointed him foreign secretary instead. Bevin received the news at 4pm on 27th July 1945, and by next evening he and Attlee were in Potsdam, negotiating the future of Germany with Stalin and Truman. Various explanations have been offered for Attlee’s late change of mind. According to Tommy Lascelles, George VI’s private secretary, it was the king who persuaded Attlee to change his mind, and there is speculation that the king’s intervention may have been prompted by Churchill. Many years later, Attlee said he had been concerned to keep Bevin and Morrison (now deputy prime minister) apart. Others have suggested that Attlee was concerned that Hugh Dalton, whom he had intended to appoint, might not be tough enough to stand up to the Russians.

But whatever the explanation, according to Bevin's biographer, Alan Bullock, there was no sign that he was disturbed by the sudden change in his political fortunes. He made no attempt to dissuade Attlee and took to the foreign office like a duck to water.

The foreign office in those days was a stronghold of toffs (today the toff count is still relatively high) educated at our finest public schools and universities, and suddenly there was a man in charge who had left school at the age of 11, who spoke with a thick Somerset accent and who dropped his aitches. It was—unfairly—said of Bevin that there were only two foreign office jobs for which he was qualified, either that of a lift attendant or secretary of state. It could have gone badly wrong but, on the contrary, he rapidly earned the respect of those who worked with him. To this day he is regarded by many as the greatest British foreign secretary of the 20th century.

No British government has ever had to confront such a range of issues as those faced by the Labour government that took office in 1945. Although the country was regarded—and regarded itself—as one of the world's great powers, in truth it was all but bankrupt. Stalin's massive shadow had fallen across Eastern Europe and threatened to extend further west: there was every prospect that Communists might take power in France and Italy. It should not be forgotten that, in the immediate post-war period, there were not yet the institutions or an idea of "the west" as we would come to know it. Above all, the Americans were, in this brief moment between victory against the Axis powers and the beginning of the Cold War, committed to withdrawing their armed forces entirely from the continent within two years. That would have left much of western Europe at the mercy of the Russians. What's more, the Americans initially took a rosy view of Stalin (as did Churchill, incidentally), believing that he was a man with whom they could do business.

Bevin, under no such illusion, would have none of it. At the outset, he was almost alone at the conference table in confronting the Russians, and quickly grasped that the best hope of defeating communism in western Europe was to merge the US, British and French occupation zones and consolidate them into a separate West German state. As this began to take shape, Stalin responded with an 11-month Soviet blockade of Berlin which, in due course, led to the founding of Nato thereby committing the US to the defence of western Europe. The US reversed its policy of withdrawal and instead came up with the Marshall Plan, a massive injection of capital that helped revive the devastated western economies. Bevin was a key player in this.

What made his achievement all the more impressive was that, for much of his time as foreign secretary, Bevin was in poor and deteriorating health. He had a history of heart problems and, like Churchill, smoked and drank too much in defiance of his doctors. By the late 1940s he was at times barely able to climb stairs.

He was also exhausted, having been continually in high executive office for nearly 30 years—including a decade in two of the most demanding posts in government at a time of unprecedented crisis.

In March 1951, Attlee reluctantly bowed to the inevitable and replaced Bevin as foreign secretary with his old enemy, Herbert Morrison. By way of consolation Bevin was appointed Lord Privy Seal. Barely a month later he was found dead, propped up in bed, the keys to his ministerial red box in his hand. He had worked until the last moment of his life.

Until now the standard work on Bevin has been Alan Bullock's massive three-volume biography, which will remain an important source for scholars of Bevin and the age in which he lived. Andrew Adonis, however, has done us a great service with this biography, introducing a new generation to one of the most extraordinary lives of the 20th century and one whose legacy lives on to this day. It is not a hagiography, however—the judgments are balanced and well sourced.

There is a chapter devoted to Bevin's failings, not least in Palestine where he resisted attempts to create from the outset a two-state solution, opting instead to relinquish Britain's UN mandate. He failed to take seriously the Schuman Declaration which would lead to the European Coal and Steel Community and in due course the EU. And he was, to the end of his days, an imperialist committed to the preservation of the Empire in its new guise as a commonwealth. To which I would add—though Adonis does not—the part he played in committing the UK to developing its own nuclear weapons ("we've got to have this thing..." he said and "we've got to have the bloody Union Jack on top of it"), albeit with a view to standing up to the Americans rather than the Russians. Bevin's critics would argue that he rendered the UK unduly dependent on the US with consequences that are still apparent but, given the stark realities of the post-war era, what choice did he have?

Some will see it as stretching a point to place Bevin, as Adonis does, on the same pedestal as Churchill, but Churchill himself remarked that, after the generals, Bevin did more than anyone to win the war. Although they were cut from very different cloth, they were both right about two of the great issues of the 20th century—the rise of Hitler and the threat posed by communism to western democracies.

In the age of Trump, the west that Bevin helped stitch together may at last be coming apart. This poses the most fundamental questions about Britain's role in the world since his day, and these are felt especially keenly in a Labour Party where, somewhere along the convulsive journey from Blair to Corbyn, foreign policy became uniquely neuralgic. Adonis concludes by lamenting the absence of any figure who compares with Bevin in the labour movement since, but I am not sure this is reasonable. Although Bevin's formidable qualities were evident from the 1920s onwards, it took a world war and its aftermath for his full greatness to be recognised. Like Churchill, he was a one-off. **P**

Chris Mullin is a former Labour minister. His latest novel, "The Friends of Harry Perkins," was recently published in paperback

As foreign secretary, Bevin played a key role in shaping post-war Europe. Left: Bevin heads to Paris to discuss the Marshall Plan in 1947



Ernest Bevin:
Labour's Churchill
by Andrew Adonis
(Biteback, £20)



Prospect Portrait

Trump's brain

The playboy president brought a clever, cultured and righteously conservative lawyer into his tent. Is US Attorney General **William Barr** now ready to bend any rule to win him a second term?

SAM TANENHAUS

ILLUSTRATION BY TIM MCDONAGH

If the lawlessness of the Trump years can be reduced to a single moment, it might well have occurred on 1st June. Six days after the police killing of George Floyd, the president decided to stage a photo opportunity by holding up a Bible in front of St John's Episcopal Church, across from the White House. At the time, protesters against police brutality were still on the square near the church. Trump's photo-op required their removal. "What ensued was a burst of violence unlike any seen in the shadow of the White House in generations," the *New York Times* reported:

As he prepared for his surprise march to the church, Mr Trump first went before cameras in the Rose Garden to declare himself "your president of law and order" but also "an ally of all peaceful protesters," even as peaceful protesters just a block away and clergy members on the church patio were routed by smoke and flash grenades and some form of chemical spray deployed by shield-bearing riot officers and mounted police.

The combined state force also included secret service agents, park police, guards brought in from the Federal Bureau of Prisons, helicopter flyovers and other tactical personnel.

Trump didn't make his "surprise march" alone. At his side were Defense Secretary Mark Esper and the head of

the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Mark Milley, who was dressed in full combat fatigues. The image it projected was not of confident strength or the assertion of "law and order" but of a petty despot's rogue aggression against American citizens. General James Mattis, Trump's former defense secretary who had steadfastly maintained his silence since resigning in December 2018, finally spoke up. "I have watched this week's unfolding events, angry and appalled," Mattis declared.

"His Justice Department is an instrument for suppressing civil rights protests"

"When I joined the military, some 50 years ago, I swore an oath to support and defend the Constitution. Never did I dream that troops taking that same oath would be ordered under any circumstance to violate the Constitutional rights of their fellow citizens." Even the still-serving Milley made a remorseful apology.

When the tear gas cleared, and the country absorbed the magnitude of what had happened—a violent attack on peace-abiding Americans by their government—the search began, inevitably, for the brains behind this ugly show of brute power. They were soon enough found. The administration official who had ordered

the infiltration of Lafayette Park, with orders to "flood the zone," deploying "the maximum amount of law enforcement out on the street," was the nation's top law enforcement official: United States Attorney General William P Barr.

This discovery was ominous, even frightening. Since the birth of the modern civil rights movement in the 1950s, the Justice Department, with its staff of over 100,000—including the the FBI, the Drug Enforcement Administration and the Civil Rights Division—has led federal efforts to redress the historic wrongs of slavery and its aftermath by ensuring full citizenship and equal rights for African Americans. It was the Justice Department that moved to put an end to lynch mob justice after the brutal murder of 14-year-old Emmett Till in 1955; that forced open whites-only universities in the Deep South and drafted the legislation that ultimately led to the landmark Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts in the 1960s.

Now, under Barr, the Justice Department has become the federal government's instrument for suppressing a civil rights protest, and the example was being followed elsewhere. As of mid-June, demonstrators had been tear-gassed in more than 100 cities across the land.

At first Barr claimed ignorance—always the safest route in Trumpworld, though when a crisis comes, the exit ▶

gets crowded. It did this time too, beginning with Trump. “The White House has placed the decision on Barr’s shoulders amid ongoing fallout,” CNN reported on its website. Soon enough even the Trumpists’ own favourite law expert Jonathan Turley, a professor at George Washington University and the lone scholar who testified on Trump’s side during the impeachment hearings, said: “If Attorney General Barr cleared that area for the purpose of the photo op, I would immediately call for him to step down, because that would be an outrageous abuse of power.”

Barr, meanwhile, was giving not one inch. On the Sunday morning TV programme *Face the Nation*, he maintained that the reports were exaggerated, pointing out that no “tear gas” had been used on the demonstrators, only pepper spray which “is not a chemical irritant.” In fact it is a chemical irritant and a type of tear gas, says the government’s own last-word authority on the subject, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

If any of this made Barr anxious, he did not show it. His public face (or mask) throughout this crisis—and many preceding it since his appointment as attorney general in February 2019—has been one of steady calm and quiet ferocity of purpose. Unlike Vice President Mike Pence and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, both of whom appear to secretly despise the president yet nonetheless abjectly serve his whims and caprices like flunkies from the age of Nero or Caligula, Barr seems neither pliable nor weak. “Those who think he’s a tool of Donald Trump are missing the point,” explained one friend to the *New York Times Magazine*. “What Trump gives Bill Barr is a canvas upon which to paint. Bill has long-standing views about how society should be organised, which can now be manifested and acted upon to a degree that they never could have before.” And yet as Barr’s notoriety grows, outside his immediate circle, the nature of these guiding principles are little appreciated.

When Barr, who is 70, agreed to become Trump’s attorney general, some were surprised. Barr didn’t need the job. He had already held it once before, at the very young age of 41, under the first president George Bush and in what now seems a golden age of responsible governance. After leaving government, Barr got rich doing corporation work and law. In 2008, he retired

early with a \$28m package. Neither is Barr unfulfilled in his “civilian” life. He has a close family—a wife and three grown up daughters (all lawyers). When the youngest, Meg, had recurrent Non-Hodgkin lymphoma at age 27 and “faced a roughly 20 per cent chance of survival,” Barr “stopped working and focused on his daughter’s care,” according to David Rohde of the *New Yorker*, one of the few to have studied Barr’s career closely. “After Meg underwent chemotherapy and a stem-cell transplant, Barr rented a house in the town of Scituate, outside Boston, so that Meg could be isolated from other patients and avoid infection. They read books, walked on the beach together, and talked about what Meg would do if she survived.”

“Barr was hired with the all-but-explicit promise to mitigate or neutralise the much-anticipated Mueller Report”

And indeed, Barr is sociable beyond the family too, being personable, cultured and well read. “His annual holiday parties, traditional Scottish *cèilidhs* with music and singers, drew hundreds whose friendships he had maintained over the years,” wrote another Barr watcher, Matthias Schwartz of the *New York Times Magazine*. “He wrote and sold a screenplay about World War II. He spent time traveling abroad and hunting birds.”

Barr did not join the early Trump insurgency. He has a history of donating to mainstream Republicans like John McCain and Mitt Romney. In 2016, Barr did give \$2,700 to Trump’s campaign, but that’s a negligible sum for a rich Republican—he also gave \$50,000 to one of Jeb Bush’s political action committees.

Barr, then, is not a card-carrying Trumpist, but he arrived in the camp knowing this made no difference. He had only to consider the case of the man he replaced, Jeff Sessions, who was the first national politician to support Trump yet now holds the distinction—in a crowded field—of being perhaps the single most humiliated of all his ex-appointees. Sessions incurred Trump’s wrath by adhering to standard lawyerly protocol, and recusing himself from Robert Mueller’s investigation of Russia’s meddling in the 2016

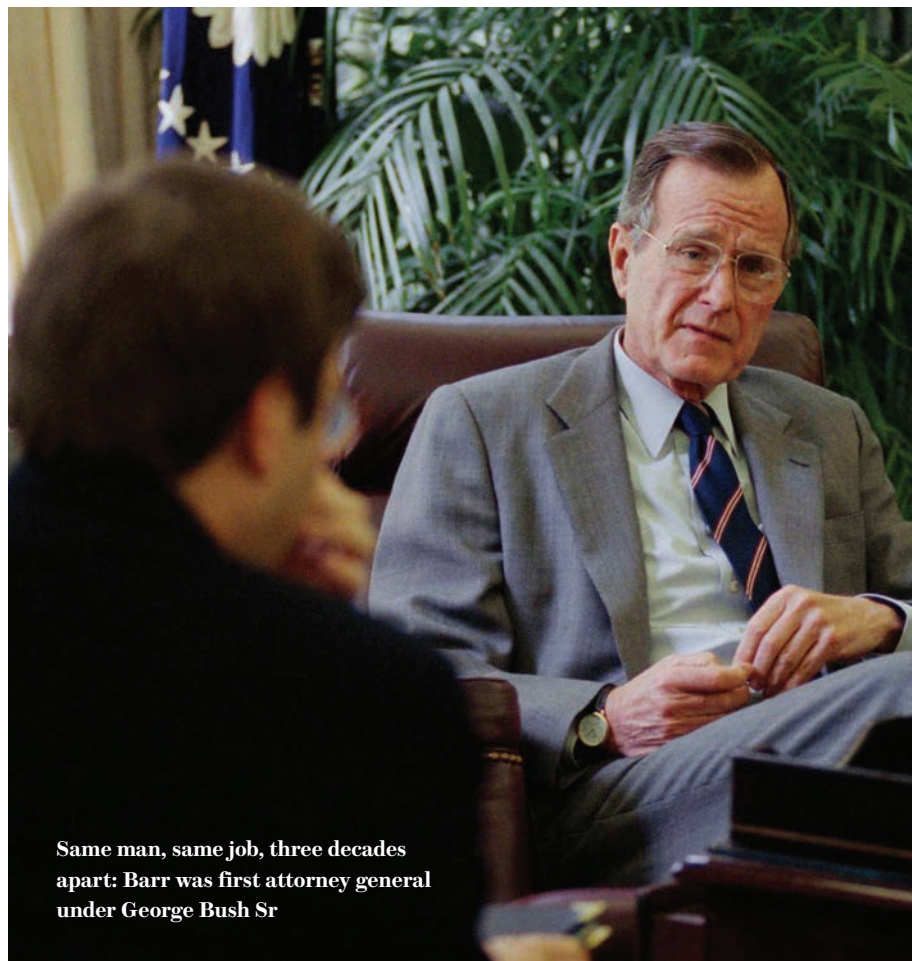
election. Trump supposed, with some reason, that the investigation helped explain the loss of the Republican majority in the House in 2018. The day after the mid-terms, Trump fired him. And the Democrats, with their majority, eventually impeached Trump.

At the Senate confirmation hearings all cabinet officials must sit for, Barr was asked how he would deal with the Mueller investigation, which would now fall under his supervision. He said: “I have known Bob Mueller personally and professionally for 30 years. We worked closely together throughout my previous tenure at the Department of Justice under President Bush. We’ve been friends since.”

This answer deftly played to the senators’ self-flattering idea of themselves as a gentleman’s club—in which friendship becomes code for gentlemanly conduct, which transcends grubby partisanship. It also sidestepped the fact—known to one and all, including those same senators—that long before his nomination, Barr had on his own instigation drafted a memo sent to the Justice Department saying, in effect, that Mueller’s investigation was invalid by definition. The argument, such as it was, started with the observation that its origin lay in the firing of James Comey, the director of the FBI and the first to begin exploring the murky passages of Trump’s Russia connections. But Trump’s prerogatives as president, the Barr logic went on, included firing anyone who works for him, including the FBI director. And for Mueller to challenge this “would do lasting damage to the Presidency and to the administration of law within the Executive branch.”

Thus did Barr, nominated to become the highest law enforcement official in the land, all but state his intention to embark on a one-man insurgency to expand “presidential supremacy” to its furthest possible horizon. This is in defiance of the US Constitution, which places strict limits on the presidency and invests greater power in Congress, including the power to oversee the presidency. In phlegmatic, bookish, intellectual Barr, then, the rogue president has found his ideal enabler.

Trum is still most comfortable with New Yorkers, most of them self-made, rough-edged, “brash,” often Jews like the real estate developer Stanley Chera, whose death from Covid-19 in April, aged 78, Trump genuinely mourned. Barr, who is also from New



Same man, same job, three decades apart: Barr was first attorney general under George Bush Sr



“Barr has the best chance of getting Trump a second term—it will require him to sabotage our election system”

the notorious Roy Cohn, sidekick to the infamous 1950s Red-baiter Senator Joseph McCarthy and *consigliere* to mobsters. Like Cohn, Barr was educated at Horace Mann, the competitive prep school for ambitious high-achievers and then went to Columbia. Like Cohn—and like Trump, for that matter—Barr was an outsider in an insiders’ world.

Trump grew up in the “outer borough” of Queens, a “bridge and tunnel” away from glittering Manhattan. The Barrs were Catholic conservatives on Riverside Drive, an uptown enclave of writers and professors in a world dominated by progressives. Today the most startling fact about Donald Barr’s years at Dalton was the hiring of a young maths teacher named Jeffrey Epstein—yes, *that* one. But at the time Donald Barr’s repu-

tation was for being “autocratic, insular, and obsessed with adherence to rules” in swinging Manhattan, and unhappy parents pushed him out in the early 1970s.

In the same period, Bill Barr himself was an undergraduate at Columbia, a left-wing campus alive with anti-Vietnam protest and clashes over the college’s slumlord presence in its neighbourhood, Morningside Heights. Barr proudly belonged to its small faction of conservatives. He wanted to go help fight the Cold War. His father had been with the Office of Strategic Services in the Second World War. Barr joined its successor, the CIA, in the mid-1970s. It was the lowest point in agency history. Long years of illegalities—“Black Ops,” including assassinations and domestic surveillance—had been exposed and come under congressional investigation. “I don’t want to be quoted as saying they were not excessive,” Barr recently told the *New York Times*. “There were some that clearly were excessive.”

But in his mind, and to many others in intelligence, the trouble wasn’t the excesses. The CIA was doing its best to fight communism and win the Cold War. The trouble was the oversight, the exposure and “body blows.” The CIA was an instrument of foreign policy for presidents from Eisenhower on, often their best way of fighting the Cold War. They should be left alone to use it as they saw fit. After he got his law degree at George Washington University, Barr began his career working for presidents, first Reagan and then Bush Sr, in the years when Republicans easily won three straight presidential elections, in part by promising to restore the power of an office that had been diminished by Watergate.

Conservative intellectuals of the 1980s promoted the concept of the “unitary executive,” which argues that the president is the sole leader of the entire executive branch. A generation later, it is the basis of the memo Barr wrote saying Trump was free to fire Comey, and Mueller had no authority to investigate him.

It was on the back of that paper that Barr was hired with the all-but-explicit promise to mitigate or neutralise the much-anticipated Mueller Report. In doing so, he showed great political skill. Rather than standing on the platform of the “unitary executive”—an argument most Americans had not heard of and would not understand even with patient explanation—Barr instead out-manoeuvred Mueller, seizing on the Special ▶

York, is a different type. He grew up closer to the city’s cultural life. His father, another Donald as it happens, was for years the headmaster of Dalton, an elite Manhattan private school. Bill’s mother Mary taught at Columbia University and was an editor at *Redbook*, the most literary of the period’s “women’s magazines.”

Yet Barr has some things in common with Trump’s mentor and dream lawyer,

Counsel's conscientious deferral to Congress on the matter of Trump's potential impeachment as an admission that the investigation turned up very little incriminating evidence. It wasn't true, as Barr well knew, and as Mueller privately objected. But it was too late. Trump charged through the opening Barr had given him and said the report amounted to a "complete and total exoneration." Whether or not Americans believed this, they heard it; all the many other claims and counter-claims that followed descended into noise.

This act and others—wanton firings of respected Justice Department officials, defiance of congressional subpoenas, ignoring court orders, misleading statements like those about tear gas—have invited contempt from leading conservative jurists like Harvard's Charles Fried. "His reputation is gone," said Fried. "His principal concern is power," and so he has become "the apologist for perhaps the most dishonest person to ever sit in the White House." Some 2,000 former Justice Department officials, many of them former prosecutors, have signed letters calling for Barr's resignation. As he wields his ideological paintbrush, Barr seems not to care or notice.

So what exactly does he want? One theory is that he has deep-seated reverence for the presidency. But as the *New Yorker's* Rohde points out, his "position on executive power wavered over time, depending on which party controlled the White House." Barr advanced no arguments in support of the Democratic presidents Clinton and Obama when they came under attack from Republican legislators. It is not presidential power, then, but *Republican* presidential power, which Barr seeks to protect under any assault or even challenge.

If presidential power is camouflage, what lies beneath it? Barr himself gave a remarkably revealing answer in a speech at Notre Dame University last year. "We must be vigilant to resist efforts by the forces of secularisation to drive religious viewpoints from the public square," Barr said, "and to impinge upon the free exercise of our faith." The speech mentions the devil words "secular" and variants—"militant secularists," "secular orthodoxy," "the new secular religion"—21 times. And what is it the militant secularists intend with their religion? They "call on the State to mitigate the social costs of personal misconduct and irresponsibility," insist the answer to "growing illegitimacy

is not sexual responsibility, but abortion," that the solution "to drug addiction is safe injection sites," that "the solution to the breakdown of the family is for the State to set itself up as the ersatz husband for single mothers and the ersatz father to their children." On top of this "the call comes for more and more social programmes to deal with the wreckage."

Tump knows victory in November depends on two things: making sure his base turns out on election day, and doing his level best to keep the Democrats—who are the majority, especially among the young—from voting. Trump can handle the first assignment, riling up his supporters through divisive rhetoric. His best weapon in achieving the second, though, is Barr's Justice Department.

"Every time Trump breaks the law, he enrages the enemy in Barr's higher combat—the 'militant secularists'"

Barr has joined Trump in trying to discredit mail-in balloting, favoured by many states to protect the health of voters. If unable to vote remotely, many may stay home rather than risk Covid-19 infection by standing in long lines. This is what Republicans want. Trump in his usual manner has been recycling falsehoods about postal voter fraud—the same claim he made in 2016 but which was thoroughly discredited.

There have been irregularities in voting, but to the extent the system is rigged it has been done through restrictions enacted by Republicans in as many as 20 states—through voter identification laws, restrictions on early voting, limited polling hours and more—whose fully intended effect has been to disenfranchise poorer people and people of colour.

In earlier times the Justice Department could be counted on to make the strongest possible case for universal enfranchisement. But recent Republican presidents, from Reagan on, have steadily undermined the department's civil rights division, and by ordering the attack on the Washington protesters, Barr has shown how much further he is willing to go.

The second effort Barr can be expected to make will be more directly against

Trump's opponent Joe Biden, who has a solid lead in polls, including in critical battleground states. If Biden continues to lead through the summer, Barr could orchestrate an "October surprise"—a sudden investigation, perhaps, of Biden's son Hunter and his business dealings in Ukraine (a red herring raised by Republicans during impeachment). Barr has already test-launched another missile, a counter-Mueller investigation seeking to show the original Russia investigation was an attempt to "sabotage the presidency of Donald Trump." Here the idea will be to implicate Obama and with him Biden.

Why go to these lengths for Donald Trump? The answer is the same one that has drawn conservative intellectuals like Barr to disrupters and rabble-rousers for many years. In the 1950s it was McCarthy; in the late 1960s it was Nixon's vice president Spiro Agnew, who attacked "the effete corps of impudent snobs"; in 2008 it was the "hockey mom" and defender of the "real America" Sarah Palin; now it is Trump. Each offered the frisson of violating the "norms" and "rules" that keep conservatives from winding the clock back and restoring the nation to what they see as its previous, better condition. Trump himself may be an irreligious libertine. But he is the means, not the end—the "blunt instrument for us," as his first Svengali Steve Bannon said in 2016.

Four years later Barr—in some ways a conventional ultra-conservative, in sharp contrast with Bannon's post-modern economic and ethnic populism—seems to believe the same thing. Every time Trump breaks the law, violates another ethical standard, rips another tear in the social fabric—every time he retweets a follower shouting "white power"—he enrages and offends the real enemy, the "militant secularists" against whom Barr is locked in the truer, higher combat. The blunt instrument can be indulged when he breaks bones and shatters glass, perhaps needs to do this to satisfy his own urges. It may even be welcome if those "excesses" further frustrate the other side.

"The most feared, criticised and effective member of Trump's Cabinet," as Rohde has said, Barr also has the best chance of getting Trump a second term—better than Trump himself. It will require him to sabotage our election system. But if doing so means a major victory against the demons of secularism, it will be worth it to Bill Barr. **P**

Sam Tanenhaus is Prospect's US Writer-at-Large

Exploring the Amazon

In this Special Summer Double-issue of AQUILA, children can trek through the rainforests, discovering rare plants and creatures along the way. They will meet the indigenous tribes who hide from the western world and find out why this beautiful, mysterious place is so important to us all.



There's a creature in the Amazon river with such a strange reputation it's hard to separate the real from the magical!

Pink River Dolphins are believed by many Amazon folk to be sacred and magical creatures. Legend has it that they carry careless swimmers away to a magical underwater city called **Encante**; a better, richer and more peaceful place - although sadly you can never return home. When night-time falls, these animals turn into beautiful men who love parties and music, but there is a catch (excuse the fishy pun). The only part of their body that can't be disguised is the blowhole on top of their heads. So what do they do? They do what any self-respecting party boy does. They cover it up with a fetching and stylish hat, of course!

For a very long time, the dolphins, known to local people as **Botos** may have been protected from being hunted for food by their legendary powers, and in taking care of the pink river dolphin, humans have perhaps protected the river as well?

Words by **Frances Durkin**. Illustrated by **Kaley McKean**

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE: *Lost Cities & Plant Hunters, Science of Rubber, Mathematical Ants, A famous Bear from Darkest Peru and Readers' Short Story winner.*

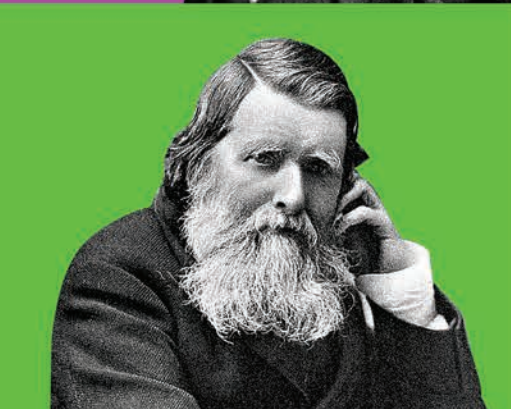
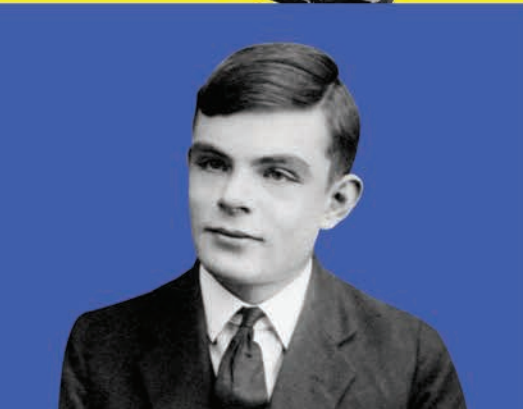
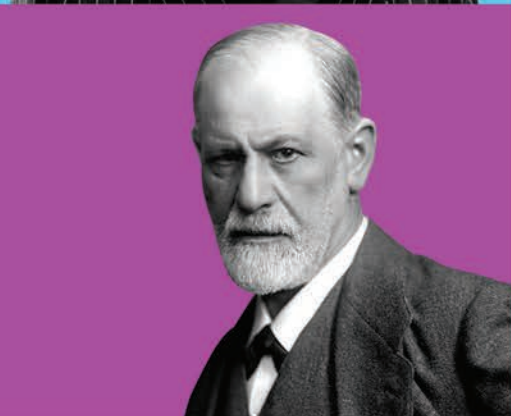
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RICHARD ROBINSON – BRIGHTON SCIENCE FESTIVAL



Zooming out

Since the first camera lens, virtual technologies have changed the way we see the world. In our new age of video communication, they touch on everything from office meetings to sex—but at what cost?

WILL SELF

Soon after the discovery of photography in the 1830s, mundane objects captured by the lens—a hairbrush, say, or a china cup—acquired a curious frisson when reproduced on photographic plates. People seeing photographs for the first time wouldn't regard them as a single integrated view, but rather as details—marvelling at the way, for example, a mason had applied the mortar between the bricks of the house opposite their own. Wolfgang Schivelbusch, the great contemporary theorist of 19th-century mechanisation, puts it thus: “the intensive experience of the sensuous world, terminated by the industrial revolution, underwent a resurrection in the new institution of photography.”

Photography was soon also compensating its enthusiasts for the close-up immediacy annihilated by mechanised transport systems. The train window's transparency metamorphosed into a magical immateriality, as the passenger ceased to be visually aware of his surroundings, but rather began to view the landscape the train passed through as a series of scenes or staged sets.

If photography supplied the foreground that was robbed by the train, then the train also delivered a huge array of new destinations. During the same period Marx developed his conception of commodities as goods rendered novel and mysterious by the fact of their transportation: imbued, like photographs, with assumptions about their production that turn them into screens; and onto which, in turn, people project their own twisted and exploitative relationships. He dubbed this “fetishism.”

If the train took from us what Ruskin called “an influence, from the silent sky and slumbering fields, more effectual than known or confessed,” the telegraph and the telephone deprived us of those forms of sociality which depended on the presence of others. It's a truth universally forgotten in our clock-watching era, that when the characters in a Jane Austen novel are expecting company on a given day, they simply wait until the visitors arrive. This imprecision in the time for a rendezvous allowed encounters to be unbounded: conversations expanded into discourses just as luncheon morphed into high tea then dinner. The Mad Hatter's

Tea Party, with its atemporal neuroticism, perfectly exemplifies the later mid-Victorian mood, caught as it was between murderous timekeeping and a neverending teatime.

Concurrent technologies of virtuality and transport are again proving to be reciprocally compensatory in our own pandemic times. In the 15 years between the inception of a fully-integrated bi-directional digital medium—the internet—and the onset of the coronavirus pandemic bringing with it imposed social distancing, viewing the world through screens has become second nature to all of us. The terms of physical meeting have been more profoundly altered than they ever were by train timetables or wristwatches: the absolute location, together with the universal synchronisation afforded by mobile phones, enables both the place *and* the time of a prospective rendezvous to be continually recalibrated.

So it was that we learnt to revolve about one another, making continuous course corrections as we homed in—the technology of virtuality reintroducing us to the notion of spontaneity, while depriving us of any possibility of serendipity. Time has been murdered—and Alice never arrives at the tea party because she gets a better invitation en route.

Paired with the curious concatenation of the smartphone, the web and the net, is the curiouser phenomenon of mass air travel. Low-cost airlines begin to clutter up the sky at almost exactly the same time as the inception of mass mobile phone usage—which was also when the world woke up to the problem of global warming. It could be that the compensatory function of virtualising technologies is once again operating here: we're destroying the natural world we once immediately and sensuously apprehended, while our capacitive touch technology provides us with a simulacrum to pet and prink, swipe and tweezer. Moreover, from the godly perspective of an EasyJet flight to Berlin (and even more so from that of a global positioning satellites on which mobile technology depends), more and more people were able to see that the world was but a grain of sand—or, at any rate, a global-village sort of place, in which there were no strangers, only “friends” you'd met on social media. ▶

Since the pandemic began, thrusting entire communities back into their real-world villages, there's been much talk about what we might call the new mandatory virtuality. Here, too, Schivelbusch's compensatory dyad seems to be at work: after all, it's our high-speed mass transit systems that have allowed the virus to spread—while it's our new technologies of virtualisation that have permitted us to stay (metaphorically) in touch. Very soon after the lockdown began, voices were heard predicting that such was the alacrity and efficiency with which virtual meetings were replacing real ones, the entire mode of doing business—and for that matter education, litigation and all sorts of administration—was going to change forever. The video call was no longer in competition with transportation, but fully asserted itself as the primary locus of human interaction. So long, that is, as your work life doesn't involve practical—let alone sensuous—engagement with material productive forces.

It's easy enough to grasp that a series of tedious encounters devised to hierarchically enjoin collective responsibility aren't significantly impoverished by being virtualised. And if we're honest, this is what most meetings in large organisations consist of. But how about more intimate ones? The anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss noted in relation to the graphic and plastic arts: "alterations in scale always sacrifice the sensible in favour of the intelligible." And here we find the internal compensation of virtualisation. In a Zoom meeting or a FaceTime encounter, we discover we must compress the full gamut of interpersonal communication—gesture, body language, pheromones (whether natural or artificial), vocal timbre—into the compass of the screen, and the range of the computer's mic. My tech-savvy sons (with whom I've been enjoying this period of reclusion) point out to me that whenever I'm on a video call I tend to boom louder than a bittern. My performance recalls to mind my own father bellowing into Bakelite telephone receivers when I was a child: "Push Button A!"—a reference to an obsolete phone box operating system—or, in the early 1980s, leaving epistolary messages on my brand new answerphone: "Dear Will, it's Dad here..."

At the time I thought it absurd—but he was merely responding to a novel technology with a mind formed by an old one. All forms of virtuality impoverish our bodily senses, but do video calls also somehow compensate our understanding? JG Ballard's minatory story "The Intensive Care Unit," first published in 1977, was uncannily prescient, imagining a world in which all presence is of the tele variety. Its disturbingly reclusive protagonist plans to meet up with his family who live elsewhere and are similarly isolated. He's only ever seen them on screen before—the children have been conceived using *in vitro* methods. It's a murderous rendezvous that begins badly when he and his wife encounter one another for the first time in the real world of his vestibule: "I was struck by her advanced age and, above all, by her small size. For years I had known Margaret as a huge close-up on one

or other of the large television screens in the house. Even in long-shot she was usually larger than this hunched and diminutive woman hovering at the end of the hall. It was difficult to believe that I had ever been excited by her empty breasts and narrow thighs."

Of course, Ballard's insight that we might prefer our relationships to be more intelligible—and hence controllable—than sensual was hardly original. We can go back to EM Forster's extraordinary 1909 story *The Machine Stops*. This visionary work appears to foretell the internet—as well as a society that turns its back on the proximity required by our species for the exchange of bodily fluids, in favour of the exchange of ideas facilitated by the eponymous Machine; one which, in time, comes to enshrine all reality. Forster didn't anticipate the factoring of sexuality into virtuality, preferring to place a chaste mother-son relationship at the centre of his tale—but of course, our own era has seen virtuality used to provoke tumescence and ejaculation at a distance. In a way, the web complex is purpose-built for pornography—in itself only a sub-species of fetishism.

"The rise of the virtual has coincided with an increase in mental illness and a decrease in sexual intercourse"

In this matter, I follow Freud, who identified the active object-oriented fetishes as overwhelmingly male: fearing his own detumescence in the face of the chaotic and uncontrollable organic reality of the Other's body, the male resorts to a transactional object that's completely manipulable, whether this be a shoe, a glove, a whip, or a keyboard attached to a computer.

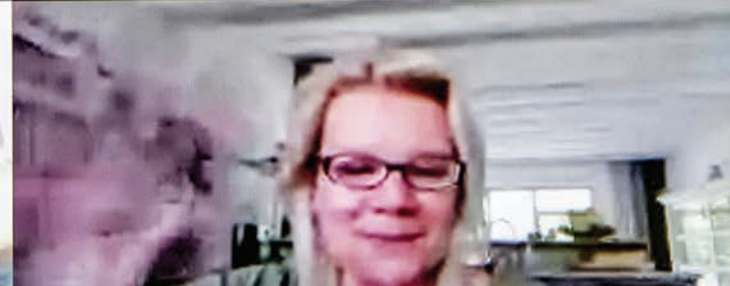
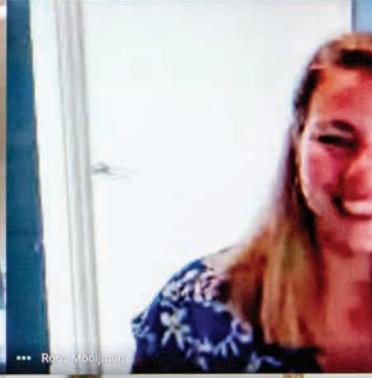
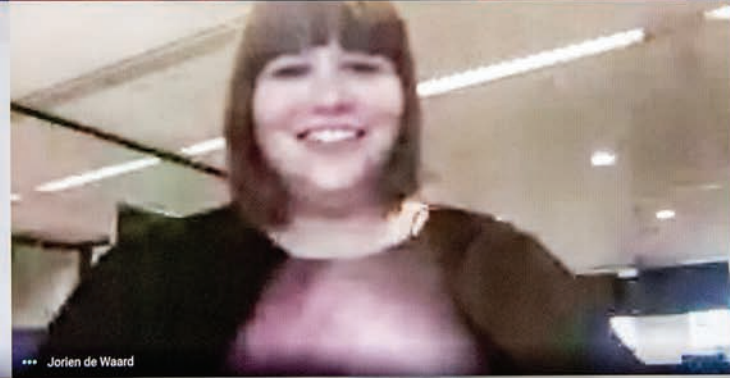
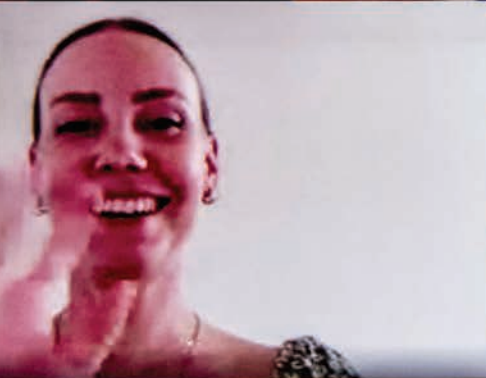
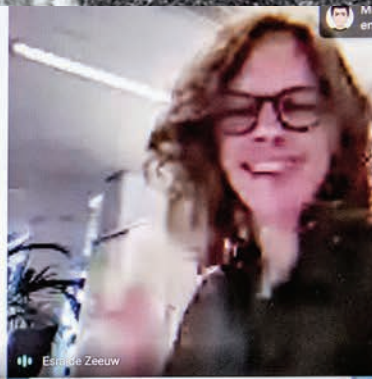
The data is often conflicting, representing all sorts of biases on the part of researchers themselves. Nevertheless, there is considerable evidence to suggest that the rise of the virtual has coincided with both an increase in mental illness—specifically depression, that most ineluctably embodied of states—and a decrease in sexual intercourse. In Japan, some pessimists are suggesting there will be a population decline of as much as 30 per cent by 2040, caused at least in part by the capacity of screen-mediated communication to at once excitingly enlarge the visible body—the "empty breasts and narrow thighs" of Ballard's disgusted protagonist's wife—and simultaneously collapse all the stages of becoming intimate with another which were once socially mediated.

Thus if the internet allows simultaneously for the illusion of intimacy *and* the confusion of pornography with sexual intercourse, it may be placing our species in a sort of embodied *zugzwang*: compelled towards the other by magnified desire, but constrained by enlarged understanding. And here, perhaps, we find the inversion of the compensatory, as our modes of being in the world join together to displace us from it. Even before ►

Above, a just-visible shoe shiner and his customer may be the first people ever photographed in this 1838 image taken by Louis Daguerre; below, Dutch office workers hold a Zoom meeting



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the pandemic added our fear of physical contagion to the messy business of touch, people were coming to terms with online dating. You don't have to be a Marxist to appreciate that apps such as Tinder, Grindr, Zoosk et al first fetishise and then powerfully facilitate—indeed, demand—the commoditisation of our bodies, just as the social media in general do this to ourselves. The business of contemporary dating has to a huge extent moved online—and business is the operative word, because the pixelated panders who own these apps are coining it off our frustrations, sexual and emotional, while we willingly assist them by turning the messy contingencies of our being (our multiplying social selves, our divisible physical ones), into a series of sales pitches.

“Apps such as Tinder and Grindr first fetishise and then powerfully facilitate the commoditisation of our bodies”

Men's tales of online dating often revolve around the disparity between the image and the reality of the other's body, women's around the over-intelligibility of men's behaviour on these sites. Socially embedded male braggadocio, posturing and mansplaining become stereotypic to the point of robotic once compressed to this narrower bandwidth. Writing in the *Guardian* last December, the novelist CJ Hauser described her purgatorial experiences on Tinder. No fan of small talk, and in search of “Smart Sad People Flaunting Their Intelligence With Panache” (aren't we all!), Hauser found that the ease of bantering online was matched by the ease of finding herself in a risky situation, having sex with a man who briefly choked her. Driven back to circumspection and attempting to extract concrete information from her computer-mediated interlocutors, she “began seeing similarities between the Turing Test and what us Tinder-searchers were doing—whether we were looking for sex or looking for love.”

The Turing test, named for the computer pioneer—and breaker of the Enigma code—Alan Turing, consists in a verbal examination of another, aimed at establishing whether they are human or an artificial intelligence. Hauser's imitation of an online Turing testing worked for her in at least one instance—and she had a relationship with a man she met that lasted over a year, and which seems to have given her some pleasure. It also left her with a curious gift: a blanket bestowed upon her by her soon-to-be-ex on their one-year anniversary, that had woven into it their initial Turing testing exchanges on Tinder: the living, breathing man she'd managed to magic out of cyberspace had disappeared back into it, leaving behind only this woolly pelt. You can say what you will about the awkwardness of first dates—or, indeed, all the social contortions by which cultures attempt to mediate their sexual relationships—but at least when you meet someone offline you can be in no doubt about their sentience.

All of which makes the fantasy of some sort of uninhibited sexual Renaissance, a “contactless sexual revolution”—as hymned by not a few jejune proselytisers—seem sadder and more deluded than just about anything. Ballard's first-time physically united family members fall upon each other with a murderousness born, surely, of the very realisation that they

were... well, once born of each other: theirs is the rage of Calibans forced to the uncomfortable realisation that their bodies aren't as pristine as machine-code nor their lives as deterministic. His vision stands to remind us of the critical mass of human phenomenology: too close, and we all become Brobdingnagian and revolting to one another—too far, and we become Lilliputians who'll annihilate one another over the merest abstractions.

My rather pessimistic view of the increasing virtualisation of our lives zooming us towards mass neuroticism in a ghastly mass synergy of fetishism and frigidity isn't shared by my friend Nick Mercer, an existential psychotherapist. Nick had to shift his practice from the consulting room to the screen this spring, and was initially sceptical about the possibilities for a truly virtual talking therapy: “John Osborne's verdict on *Waiting for Godot* came to mind: ‘A very long chew on a very dry prune.’ This, and the pallor of the Greek underworld as I sit squinting in an unnaturally hunched position at the tiny screen of my phone with knotted brow straining to hear the communications of the ghostly figure before me. These delinquent imaginings flourish in the physical absence of the other because these ghostly images lack the power of presence—that total immersion in the physical.”

But two months on, doing 10 hours of therapy a week online, Nick finds himself enchanted by the same prospect: “I've seen a whole rich new world open up, one almost unthinkable in the gloom of the old consulting rooms. Heresies abound. A brave new world—and such creatures in it, I muse, as a woman carrying a baby waves to the screen, as she passes through the room and touches my client on the shoulder in gentle apology—then a cat appears. Meanwhile at my end the postman calls and I have to answer. Each time the space resumes without fuss and each time I'm less fazed as the old orthodoxies crumble. And each time the soup of it feels richer, that's the thing that quickens the pulse... that the relationship—the allotted time and space of it—can not only survive outside the physical confines of the room but actually increase in psychic compression by expanding to include the everyday.”

Coming from a school of therapy that founds its methods in phenomenology—the assumption that human embodiment is a given of the human condition, rather than something we have to reason our way into from the Cartesian position of a virtualised understanding—Nick's enthusiasm may seem bizarre. But we must defer—at least a little—to someone who is actually doing this particular work, and at a time when rates of mental illness are increasing. Perhaps Nick's hopes of zooming towards better psychological wellbeing represent the ultimate compensatory dyad of virtualising technology; the frisson that surrounds the intellectual apprehension of the other's life-world substitutes for their physical presence—and provides far greater true empathy, as opposed to the messy and unpredictable sentiments afforded us by proximity and physical sympathy.

I hope so. Because if lockdowns, quarantines and social distancing measures stretch ahead of us into the future—while Facebook and Google tighten their techno-hold on the world's governance *à cause de la crise*, we're going to be in severe need of effective therapy to counter the mass waves of hysteria and neurosis that will, I predict, inevitably attend the full inception of the Machine, and the dawning of the age of Intensive Care. **P**

Will Self's most recent book is the memoir “Will.” He holds the Chair in Contemporary Thought at Brunel University

THE URGENT NEED TO RENEW REASON

The first step in reviving reason must be, of course, to solve the knotty problems which created the original loss of faith in reason. They were the adoption of an officially fatalistic view of the universe, and the capitulation of the mathematicians when faced with a contradiction in set theory. If time is a kind of space, a fatalistic vision of the universe follows. There was much swallowing of doubts and hesitations, but for a hundred years consensus opinion has deferred to the scientists, accepting their theory of relativity. What we now urgently need is a new theory of relativity which does not have this intensely toxic implication. For nearly a hundred years the mathematicians have treated their artificial version of set theory as if it were holy writ. The consequences have not been as far-reaching as the fatalism of relativity theory, but they have had a subtly insidious effect on mathematics teaching. Mathematics teaching has widely suffered subliminally from a persistent vein of pedantry and artificiality. The result is that it has lost much of the positivity, operational fluidity and self-assurance needed when it is used in science. Scientists and technologists need confident mathematics: but this is just what mathematics has ceased to be.

Solutions exist to both problems, but the subject hierarchies seem to have a vested interest in sticking to their logically defective narratives. The very word 'space' carries associations of freedom. Another technical term for 'dimension' is 'degree of freedom', but we cannot move about in time, either forwards or backwards: we are stuck in The Now. Apologists for Einstein's relativity made much play of its move away from Newton's Absolute Space, but what has been put in its place, is an even more absolute Space-Time. This was, at best, a stop-gap solution. What was needed was a comprehensive epistemological basis for science — one which treats it as an axiom that space itself needs to be explained. The solution to the contradiction in set theory involves recognising that there are two kinds of contradiction, the parallel and the serial. In the serial case the meaning keeps switching between incompatible "dictions".

A similarly absolutist attitude is being maintained in mathematics, where the Official Story is still that Cantor's transfinite sets "exist", even though almost everybody has accepted that the elements of these immense fanciful super-infinities can never be mathematically defined. The hierarchy seem to have forgotten... that the very basis of mathematics' reputation for rigour is — proper definition.

philosophyforrenewingreason.com



MARVEL
COMIC

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Arts & books

American pantheon

Comics artist Stan Lee created memorable superheroes who embody the deep conflicts at the heart of the US, writes *Sam Leith*



Stan Lee:
A Life in Comics
by Liel Leibovitz
(Yale UP, £16.99)

There's a paragraph, early on in Liel Leibovitz's life of Stan Lee, that pretty much causes the jaw to hit the floor and the eyeballs to pop out. It was late 1961 and comics were in the doldrums: the psychiatrist Fredric Wertham's attack on the industry as damaging to children had led it to adopt a prudish Comics Code to avoid government regulation. Seriously considering quitting Atlas Comics (later called Marvel) for good, Lee hunkered down with the artist Jack Kirby and created the Fantastic Four. As Leibovitz ably describes, the Four were like nothing that had come before: superpowered, yes, but bickering and uncertain—polyvalent. They were morally and personally complex and relatable in ways that the old superheroes in whose shadow they were born were not.

The main axis of internal friction mirrored the friction between their creators. Ben Grimm, "The Thing," was Kirby: saturnine, street-smart and brawny. Reed Richards, "Mr Fantastic," was Lee: clever but irritating, all long words and big ideas.

But it was what came next, and how fast, that astonishes. When the Fantastic Four became an instant hit, Lee's Atlas boss told them to write some more superheroes: "the Hulk arrived in May 1962, followed, in August, by both Spider-Man and Thor. Iron Man debuted the following March, and by the time 1963, the grievous year of the Kennedy assassination, slouched to an end, Lee, almost always working with Kirby, had delivered Doctor Strange, the X-Men and the Avengers."

Those mere two years, then, gave us a constellation of characters and a fictional universe that has endured for seven decades, and by the end of the 1960s, "the Silver Surfer, the Black Panther, and the Guardians of the Galaxy had all joined the pantheon." Since then the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) series of 23 films, beginning with *Iron Man* in 2008 and completed last year with *Avengers: Endgame*, has collectively grossed \$22.5bn and brought the characters created by Lee, who died aged 95 in 2018, to a new global audience.

Back in the 1960s, Lee gave comics an idiom they had not possessed before. I don't think it's too much to say that 1962-3 was for comic books what *Lyrical Ballads* was for poetry. The Marvel and DC universes are almost certainly the most extensive pieces of continuous narrative in human history—which should commend them to the attention of anybody interested in culture.

That said, they're still apt to be dismissed as kids' stuff—even if the moral panic that used to surround them has more or less evaporated. For most of the time in which he was doing his best work, Lee got used to people

wincing when he told them what he did. He told a story ("like many of Lee's finest... probably apocryphal," says Leibovitz) about mentioning to a gun salesman in the Catskills that he was a comic book editor. "Totally reprehensible," the man replied. "You should go to jail for the crime you're committing."

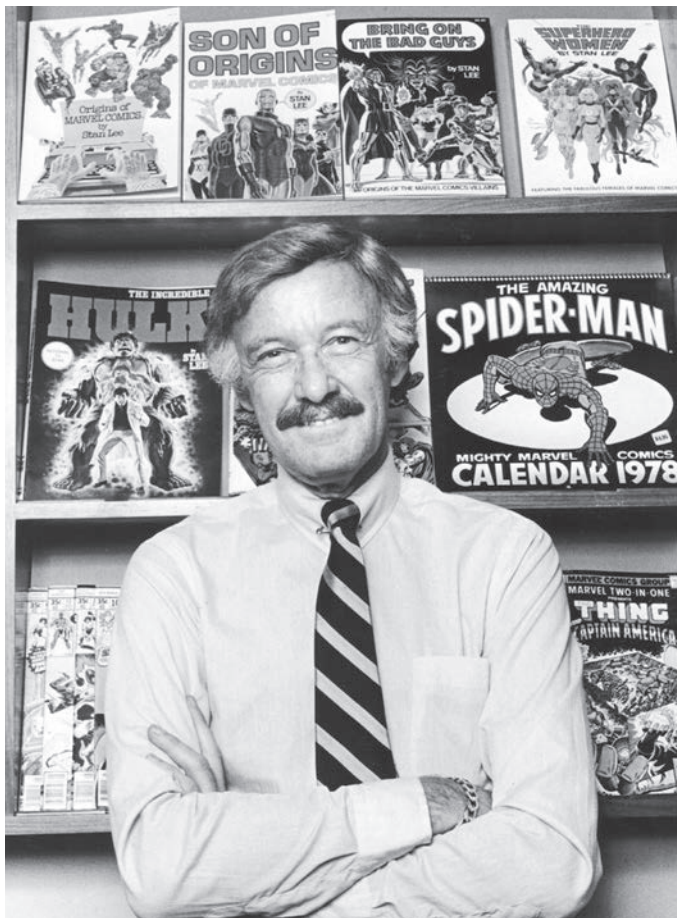
"Relatively few individual comics have much to them, but each adds another layer of varnish to a mythos"

Even superhero creators sometimes have their doubts about men in tights. Alan Moore (co-creator of *Watchmen*) has more than once said words to the effect that "the mass devotion of middle-aged people to superhero figures might be a cultural indicator of intellectual and/or emotional arrest." Warren Ellis, one of the best writers currently working in superhero comics, has called them "corporate-owned mythologies." He didn't mean it as a compliment, but mythologies is spot on. These comics play endless variations on essentially immortal characters—what another comics writer, Grant Morrison, called "Supergods" in his 2011 book of that title (US subtitle: "What masked vigilantes, miraculous mutants, and a sun-god from Smallville can teach us about being human.") These comics trade in archetypes—often crude ones—and their literary effects are aggregational. Relatively few individual comics have much to them, but they add another layer of varnish to a mythos.

The resilience and adaptability of those myths, their symbolic breadth and their protean meanings, made them attractive repositories for broad identification and big ideas. Myths are, as Lévi-Strauss said about animals, "*bonnes à penser*." Leibovitz rightly emphasises how fungible these characters are. He refers to Mark Millar's miniseries *Superman: Red Son*, imagining a world where baby Supes landed in a collective farm in Soviet Ukraine rather than a wheatfield in Kansas. He might also have mentioned how well Neil Gaiman transposed Marvel's pantheon to the Elizabethan era in *Marvel 1602*.

The human and self-doubting superheroes of Marvel's Golden Age—it's telling that among the technical innovations that distinguished *Spider-Man* was the extensive use of thought bubbles, "a feature rarely used in ▶

Avengers assembling:
Stan Lee was responsible for some of Marvel's most iconic characters



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the action-oriented world of comic books at the time”—arrived in the midst of America’s tumultuous 1960s. They caught a wave. The Hulk, that oddest and most existentially troubled of comics characters, became a pin-up for students and was named in *Esquire*’s 1965 list of the most influential people on college campuses. The X-Men, likewise, were held to allegorise the civil rights struggle—with Professor Xavier standing in as a groovy, meliorist Martin Luther King and Magneto as the militant Malcolm X. And the Black Panther was the Black Panther before the Black Panthers were the Black Panthers.

As Leibovitz puts it: “Young Americans, seeking art forms that addressed the turmoil—social, political, emotional, moral—they were experiencing every day, did what they have always done in moments of upheaval and turned to the nation’s homegrown art forms. In the 1930s, that meant jazz and Hollywood movies; in the 1960s, attention shifted to rock ‘n’ roll and comics. The first was libidinal, bacchanalian, cathartic; the second was heady and loose, *a sandbox of big but pliable ideas* [my italics]. Both were, in the true tradition of indigenous American art, passionately dedicated to merry theft—of concepts, of backbeats, of aesthetics—and both inhaled, deeply, the fumes of influence, making them ideal instruments for processing anxieties in real time.”

The Jewishness of the early comics industry was memorably given imaginative life in Michael Chabon’s novel *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*. It’s ever present in the story, from its economics, modelled on the piecemeal system of the garment industry in which Lee’s fabric-cutter father traded before the Depression wiped him out, to its sensibility, shaped by ideas of secret identity, difference and assimilation—as well the ever-present background of the Holocaust.

Leibovitz, whose book appears in a series called *Jewish Lives*, drills deeply into this. Born Stanley Lieber, Stan Lee was a graduate of the same Bronx high school that produced fellow comics artists Will

Eisner and Bob Kane (then Robert Kahn). Lee was a bookish child with a flair for showmanship. He wrote in his high-school yearbook that his goal was “to reach the top—and *stay* there.” He did—though he never wrote the Great American Novel to which he aspired. In 1939, aged 17, he joined Timely Publications (later Atlas), run by a relative, as an office-boy in the comics division—which then consisted of Joe Simon, Jack Kirby and Syd Shores. He went about the place playing an ocarina and, from time to time, sporting “a four-colour beanie with a propeller on the top.” He was irritatingly talkative (at school he’d been known as Gabby) but went out of his way to be ingratiating, had bright ideas, and was fast promoted.

“For young Americans, comics were a sandbox of big but pliable ideas”

Even his diction was New York Jewish to the syllable. Leibovitz retails a story of Lee having lunch alfresco in a fancy restaurant when a dollop of birdshit landed on his shoulder: “Lee looked heavenward, shook his fist, and yelled in mock outrage: ‘For the gentiles, you sing!’”

But it’s the Jewishness of his imagination more than his sense of humour that made a difference. Leibovitz borrows from the historian Garry Wills the idea that America’s Protestant soul is a contest between head and heart: elite, technocratic “modernism” on one side and tent-revival “fundamentalism” on the other. “Anyone writing comics in 1941 was toiling in the shadow of two colossal figures, Superman and Batman,” Leibovitz writes, identifying them as “not much more than the sum of their derring-do”: less human beings than the “embodiment of the two warring poles of American spiritual life.” Batman was a “wealthy and privileged Brahmin with no special

Stan Lee internalised the conflicts at the heart of the American psyche to create morally subtle superheroes—like Spider-Man

powers who used his endless resources and superior intelligence to deliver a vastly improved version of local government.” Superman, on the other hand, is “a creature of the fundamentalist imagination”—from his “vaguely Hebrew name Kal-El, meaning either ‘voice of God’ or ‘the entirety of God’” to his Mosaic origin story. Superman, in sum, is Jesus with X-ray vision and disco tits.

Lee’s creations, Leibovitz argues, internalised those conflicts. And they contextualised them in a network of interdependent human relationships: “Rather than champion this pole or that of a dichotomy that was too extreme and inhospitable for actual human beings, [Lee and Kirby] created a world in which the best human beings could hope for was not deliverance by some god in tights but the hard, communal work that makes life just a little bit better.”

Within the Fantastic Four, for instance, Reed Richards is the modernist, and Ben Grimm is the fundamentalist. The Thing is essentially a golem, and Reed Richards is possessed by the dybbuk, which gives him his lust for scientific knowledge. In more compressed form, the Bruce Banner/Hulk dyad gives us golem and dybbuk in one person. Spider-Man, Leibovitz goes on to argue—a little less persuasively but no less ingeniously—draws on the myth of Cain. The Fantastic Four’s first confrontation with the godlike Galactus and his herald, the Silver Surfer, draws on a plot archetype from the Book of Numbers and pivots, he says, on a series of essentially Talmudic exchanges about the nature and dignity of man in the divine scheme.

At a less arcane level, even one of Stan Lee’s earliest comics grappled with an enduring theme of these stories. As Stan famously put it in *Spider-Man* (quoting or paraphrasing, Leibovitz tells us, Jesus Christ, Winston Churchill and FDR inter alia): “With great power there must also come—great responsibility!” In a 1941 strip called *Jack Frost*, written when Lee was just 19, the titular superhero rescues a damsel in distress—but then refuses to go back into a burning building to rescue the villain. The villain burns to death. The police try to arrest him for murder, and Jack vanishes back to the North Pole in a fit of pique. Crudely, what would it mean to have superpowered characters wandering about the place dispensing justice as they see fit outside the law? It’s a question to which superhero comics return incessantly and which, in the 2006 Civil War storyline, came to animate the whole of the Marvel Universe.

What Leibovitz’s emphasis slightly sidesteps is the way that, while the Marvel Universe may indeed have had a Jewish cast of mind, it was on the surface almost insanely syncretic. It has been an omnivorous and indiscriminate plunderer of myths and myth-fragments. The Norse and Greco-Roman pantheons rub along happily with Aztec and Polynesian deities and the demons of early-modern Christian Pandaemonium—as do gods worshipped by alien races and any number of other omnipotent and near-omnipotent beings such as Galactus, the Beyonder, Thanos and so on. Miracles are everyday occurrences in Marvel. The resurrection of the dead is a cinch. The one thing that looks impossible here is monotheism.

Or maybe not. As Leibovitz says more than once, Lee’s greatest creation may have been himself. From the late 1960s onwards, Lee was as much impresario as creator: touring college campuses, giving TV and magazine interviews, and speechifying from the soap-box slot in his Bullpen Bulletins. He dreamed up the fan-club gimmickry, the No-Prizes (empty envelopes mailed to fans who wrote in pointing out continuity errors), and developed Marvel itself as a brand with Lee at the centre of it. And in old age he

parlayed his own persona into a series of avuncular cameos in the Marvel Cinematic Universe—which became so predictable that the spoofily self-referential DC animation *Teen Titans Go! To The Movies* includes a cartoon Stan Lee, voiced by the man himself, appearing clinging to the windscreen of a speeding golf cart: “I’m back! I don’t care if it’s a DC movie! I love cameos!”

Like many artists, Lee had a ruthless streak. A baleful subplot of this book concerns the treatment of Jack Kirby, who—though he semi-reluctantly returned to work for and with Lee over the years—went to his grave convinced that Lee had at worst sold him out and at best failed to fight his corner when it came to a fair deal over his creations. The sorry saga of intellectual property in superhero comics is touched on by Leibovitz but not explored in detail.

Anyway, it worked out okay for Stan Lee. He never got the slice of his creations he by rights deserved—but he did much better out of them than most of his predecessors and contemporaries. He drew a million-dollar annual salary as chairman emeritus when he stepped down in 1996 as Marvel’s publisher. And he stayed on board as they moved, from the noughties on, from being at the margins to the centre of American popular culture.

“Lee created a world in which the best human beings could hope for was not deliverance by some god in tights, but the hard, communal work that makes life a little better”

The cleverness of the MCU films’ adoption of its source material was in following Lee’s lead. Fans were put at the heart of their production: the in-jokes and Easter eggs, the attention to the comics canon, the tapestry of cross-over appearances, and the balance between jokiness and operatic emotion helped to preserve the winning feel of the comics. They’ve even got noticeably more right-on between 2008’s *Iron Man* and more recent outings for the Black Panther and female superhero Captain Marvel. With great power...

Leibovitz, it should be said, can sometimes be charged with over-exuberance. He talks about the “immense depths” of the Fantastic Four, likens Stan Lee to Bob Dylan (“another gnomish Jewish artist... his comic books, like Dylan’s songs, have become vast cultural canvases onto which anyone interested in the art form can paint her or his own interpretations”), and Kirby to “a latter-day Goya capturing the vicissitudes and torments of the suffering human soul.” Of artist Steve Ditko’s full-face mask design for Spider-Man, he writes: “to look at Spider-Man’s blank eyes was to feel not only his pain and insecurity but your own as well, like an abyss you stare into long enough only to realise that it, too, is staring into you.”

Your mileage, as they say, may vary—but better, I think, to over-interpret than take the traditional route of refusing to interpret at all. Make mine Marvel.

Sam Leith is literary editor of the Spectator

Government urged to level the playing field on EPCs for off-grid homes



A Q&A with George Webb,
Chief Executive of Liquid Gas UK

Energy efficiency goes hand in hand with the decarbonisation agenda, however, the tool currently used to measure energy efficiency in the UK is not up to scratch. Energy Performance Certificates commonly known as EPCs have a major flaw, which results in vastly different EPC ratings for identical homes in rural areas which do not have access to mains gas and results in thousands of pounds of unnecessary extra spend on rural homes.

Prospect spoke to Liquid Gas UK's Chief Executive George Webb to discuss EPCs, why it needs reform and what it means for the consumer.

Why does this happen?

The EPC rating is positioned as a measure of energy efficiency, in reality however, the rating is actually a measure of energy cost per m². This is due to the disproportionate focus on the cost of the input fuel. This means that two identical properties, one off-grid and one on-grid, will have vastly different EPC scores just because of the cost of the fuel they use, with lower carbon fuels being penalised.

The below table demonstrates the different EPC ratings for a typical off-grid property when changing only the fuel type and heating system.

Case Study: Typical off-grid property

Property features: Sandstone/Limestone as built (no insulation), pitched roof (250mm loft insulation in part), full secondary glazing, boiler and radiator – heating controls, programmer, thermostat and TRVs. Low energy lighting in all outlets.

Heating system	Current Rating
Mains gas boiler	60 (D)
LPG boiler	28 (F)
Oil boiler	47 (E)
Electric boiler	18 (G)
Electric high retention storage heater	42 (E)

What does this mean for rural homes?

Left unaddressed, rural homeowners will be forced to disproportionately spend far more money on off-grid homes to reach an EPC Band C, when compared to an identical home on the gas grid. The difference

may be as much as two or even three EPC ratings, not to mention the thousands of pounds of extra spend.

The EPC methodology also paradoxically favours higher carbon fuels, such as heating oil, instead of encouraging lower carbon heating solutions such as LPG, bioLPG or heat pumps. This is because homeowners will be mobilised to improve ratings by using the cheapest fuel available rather than improving building fabric. This 'fabric last' approach not only fails to deliver building standard improvements for residents, it also directly counters UK Government's wider decarbonisation objectives.

It also has the potential to damage the wider rural housing market, especially if certain levels of EPCs are mandated in the future. Due to unjustly low EPC scores, buy to let mortgages could be refused and result in the supply of rental properties in rural areas. This in turn, could cause tenants' monthly rent rates to increase.

What are your proposals to reform EPCs?

It's a simple fix. If UK Government wants future energy efficiency policy to be a success, removing the input fuel cost element from the methodology will help off-grid homeowners achieve an EPC that is an accurate energy efficiency rating of their home.

This will ensure homeowners are empowered to make the right decisions when looking to improve the energy efficiency of their homes.

What's the role for LPG in a decarbonised future?

A recent study from Eurogas suggested that only 14% of UK households would be willing to change their heating system in order to help combat climate change. The same poll found that almost half of UK customers would be unlikely to upgrade their heating system if they have to retrofit, or if they have to pay an upfront cost.

To help decarbonise rural homes, in addition to improving energy efficiency, we need to make cutting heating emissions as easy and cost-effective as possible. We also need to make sure we give households choice in how they do this. A 'one size fits all' approach to rural homes won't work.

For rural homes, LPG boilers offer a long-term, cost effective pathway to decarbonisation through the gradual introduction of bioLPG into the mix; this means over time carbon emissions will significantly reduce.

BioLPG is a versatile, 'drop-in' renewable solution which can provide up to 90% emissions reduction compared to fossil based LPG. Already available on the market today, bioLPG is chemically indistinct from LPG and can be used as it is, just like conventional LPG. This means it can be 'dropped-in' to existing supply chains and can be used by consumers in their existing heating appliances, stored in existing bulk tanks and cylinders, and transported using today's infrastructure and skilled workforce.

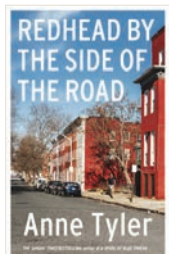
We launched our 2040 Vision last year, which demonstrates industry's ambition to transition to bioLPG by 2040 and as bioLPG becomes increasingly available to the UK market, Liquid Gas UK wants to work in partnership with UK Government and Devolved Administrations to drive consumer behaviour in rural areas towards greener solutions.



Liquid Gas UK
www.liquidgasuk.org

Family matters

Anne Tyler's masterful new novel asks what it might take for an unhappy man to change his life, finds *Benjamin Markovits*



Redhead by the Side of the Road
by Anne Tyler
(Chatto & Windus,
£14.99)

The Jane Austen of Baltimore:
Anne Tyler

Anne Tyler has built a remarkably successful and steady career across almost six decades without having to adapt too much the narrative strategies that eventually produced her literary breakthrough in the early 1980s. If she's had a late flowering (her novel *A Spool of Blue Thread* was shortlisted for the Booker in 2015—more than 30 years after her first Pulitzer nomination), it wasn't, like Philip Roth in the 1990s, because she changed stride. On the BBC recently, she said: "I always say when I'm starting a book, 'This one's gonna be different.' About halfway through, I say, 'Oh, darn, it's the same book over again.'" She writes about family life and the way you have to shape your personality to live with other people. These things change with the times but they don't lose their importance. Her worldview may be reliably, even comfortably, old fashioned but it is still perfectly capable of processing new information.

Baltimore, where Tyler lives and where most of her stories are set, serves in her fiction as a kind of generic all-American town where, as she wrote in her 1982 masterpiece *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant*, the houses are "dark and deep and secretive." But it's also a specific hybrid—on the border between north and south, with a tradition both of moneyed gentility and a backcountry white working class. For the most part, though, her

subject is not the majority-black city that Baltimore has become, with its deep problems: a shrinking population, and one of the highest homicide rates in the country. Her characters tend to be white and aspiring middle class and the problems they face are the inherent problems of family life: fighting between parents and kids, and trying to learn from your experience of one of those roles as you tackle the other.

For Jane Austen (Tyler often gets compared to her), the most interesting decision her characters could make was: who should I marry? And Austen realised that the moments leading up to that decision could provide, in novel after novel, both a narrative structure and a deep test of moral sensibility. As Ezra puts it in *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant*, when thinking about his mother: "She had imagined a perfectly wonderful plot—a significance to every chance meeting, the possibility of whirlwind courtships, grand white weddings, flawless bliss forever after." But Tyler's subject is mostly what happens afterwards. The scope is larger, and the outcomes messier—because there isn't a single pressure point on which the stories can converge. And one of the main forces that she tries to catalogue, the effects of a kind of psychological erosion, is more difficult to catch on film. Instead of the grand white wedding, you get, as a character says in *Homesick*, the "grayness of things; a half-right-and-half-wrongness of things. Everything tangled, mingled, not perfect any more."

"Tyler's worldview may be reliably old fashioned, but it is still perfectly capable of processing new information"

Her longevity means that her work has become a record of a certain kind of America, especially of "the dauliness of women's lives," for the past half century. They struggle with husbands and kids, increasingly take on work to support the family, maintain homes and traditions—the Halloweens and Thanksgivings that mark the passing year—by sewing, filing, shopping, cooking, baking, and by the kind of attention to detail that turns an occasion into a ritual that can be repeated. But the picture she paints also leaves a lot out. In *A Spool of Blue Thread*, she acknowledges as much when Abby, a retired social worker, reflects: "Toward the last it had seemed that her clients' needs were bottomless—that society was falling apart faster than she could patch it together. She was getting out just in time, she had felt." And the hero of her new book, *Redhead by the Side of the Road*, echoes the sentiment: "Micah had about given up on this country, to ▶



tell the truth. It seemed to be going to hell these days, and he didn't have the sense he could do anything about it."

The novel that follows keeps its focus on one man's life. It's both rather slight and very good; the kind of story that might have made a chapter in one of her longer works. Micah is a handyman and freelance tech nerd: he provides a relatively friendly face for people who need help with their computers. In his mid-forties, financially and emotionally self-sufficient, he lives in the basement of the apartment block where he serves as a superintendent. There are gaps in his life (friends, children, the striving for some harder-to-reach ambition), but he fills them with the daily routine: a morning jog, the weekly cleaning rota ("he had a system: he set the dishes to soak while he wiped the table and countertop, put away the butter, ran his stick vacuum under his chair in case he'd dropped any crumbs. His actual vacuuming day was Friday, but he liked to keep on top of things between times.") And occasional visits from his girlfriend Cass.

"The only way to escape family conflict is to get out as early as you can and not have any kids yourself"

One of Tyler's strategies is to set up a problem early in a story (a lump in a thigh, a dream of infidelity), and then ignore it while ordinary life goes on, until the ordinary life crashes into the problem again and something has to be done about it. In Micah's case, the problem is his relationship—or rather, as Philip Larkin might say, the fact that Micah has become "too selfish, withdrawn / And easily bored to love." Cass is renting an apartment where the landlady won't tolerate pets; then one day she stumbles upon Cass's cat and threatens to evict her. When Cass tells Micah he makes a joke about it. He doesn't say, "you can always stay with me," because he figures if that's what she wanted, she would have asked. And so the problems begin.

Tyler's characters divide into two basic types, with a few crossovers: the mess-makers, and the tidiers. There's often a gender element to this division but not always. In many

of her novels, women provide the mess—and if not women themselves, then the family life they tend to be responsible for. Mess means accumulation of people and possessions and debts, habits and appointments and emotional things, too, resentments and slights and infatuations and regrets. The tidiers try to keep all this in some kind of order. They correct your grammar and clean the oven after every meal and either dream of living alone or already do. They write guidebooks for businessmen who hate travel (*The Accidental Tourist*) or dream up travel agencies that will manage the disorder of holidays, the packing and arranging and meals (*A Spool of Blue Thread*), or walk out on marriages or family holidays to escape to some anonymous town where you can rent a room and live more simply and cleanly (*Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant*, *Ladder of Years*).

They do these things because family life is messy and most of what you learn from it as a child is conflict-modelling. You learn how to fight from your parents—both because you watch *them* fight, and because you have to fight with your siblings for their attention. And the only way to escape it, as Larkin again might say (he would have made an interesting Tyler character; Mr Bleaney and Micah Mortimer would get along), is to get out as early as you can and not have any kids yourself. This is more or less what Micah has done. "You have to wonder what goes through the mind of a man like Micah Mortimer," the novel begins. "He lives alone; he keeps to himself; his routine is etched in stone." The question at the heart of the book is—is he unhappy enough to change?

Her work, in spite of all the prizes, has sometimes been accused of cuteness or sentimentality. The conflict between her character types is also the tension at the heart of every novel: to recreate the mess of reality; and to contain it in the shape of a story. And sometimes Tyler's endings can seem a little tidy—all the details, even some of the symbols, feel a little like they've been lined up for a family photograph.

In *A Spool of Blue Thread*, the wayward son, Denny, goes to his mother's sewing cupboard after her death, to mend his father's outfit for the funeral. The necessary spool of thread almost rolls into his hand, as if his mother had reached out to him, in forgiveness—though it's not quite clear in which direction the forgiveness needs to go. A running joke or motif in *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant* is the family meal that one of the sons, Ezra, who runs the restaurant, always tries to set up—even though they can never make it to the end before somebody walks

An all-American sort of town: Baltimore, where much of Tyler's fiction is set

out in a huff. It's the kind of repetitive comic failure that feels more like part of a pattern, the weave of a tapestry, than real life.

“Tyler’s work, in spite of all the prizes she has won, has sometimes been accused of cuteness or sentimentality”

But that's partly because Tyler isn't strictly a realist. And the opposite of sentimentality isn't realism, it's just another kind of distortion—cynicism, or whatever you want to call it. One reason she deals in symbols and patterns is because family life is often the closest any of us will get to knowing what it's like to be a character in a novel, to have a role in an ongoing story, where the role both shapes you and hems you in. Micah, as it happens, has many sisters, and part of the action takes place at one of their extended family dinners, where everybody teases Micah for being an old stick-in-the-mud, a narrow and lonely creature of routine—and Micah finds himself playing along with the joke. Which provides one of those slight incidents that pushes him a little towards a new detachment, a clearer view of himself. He also has to tell his sisters Cass didn't make it to the dinner because they have broken up, and hear their reactions.

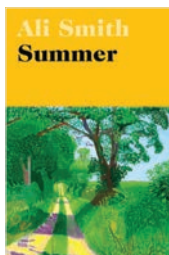
Nabokov, in *Invitation of a Beheading*, talks about the point of his own fiction: “But don't you think... that what he is trying to do... practically in all his novels... is to express the fantastic recurrence of certain situations?” Reading a lot of Anne Tyler on the trot can make you think she's playing a similar game. But that's partly because her subject matter is narrow enough that you can't avoid a certain amount of overlap. In *Homesick*, a teenage boy hitchhikes back to Baltimore under the vague impression that his uncle might be his real dad. And the story in *Redhead* shifts course when a college-age kid shows up at Micah's door for a similar reason—his mother used to go out with him at university. It's a subplot that lets Tyler go back into Micah's past and play a little revisionist history. Also, to ask and answer questions about how he got this way.

In other ways, though, *Redhead* does read like an evolution of sorts. It's not just shorter than most Tyler books, but sparer, too. And apart from the question that frames the novel (“You have to wonder what goes through the mind of a man like Micah Mortimer?”), it's relatively free from commentary. Things, unusual things (it's not every day that your college girlfriend's son shows up at your door), happen in the midst of the more usual ones, but they occupy the same kind of attention. And the sequence of events answers a very small question persuasively: what would it take for this lonely guy to realise he's not that happy? To get a glimpse of the other, available kind of unhappiness: family life.

Benjamin Markovits's latest novel is “Christmas in Austin” (Faber)

State of (half) the nation

Ali Smith's last-minute novels mix and match different times and places. But on issues like Brexit she struggles with the opposing side, finds *Anthony Cummins*



Summer
by Ali Smith
(Hamish Hamilton,
£16.99)

Ali Smith's new novel is the final volume in a four-part series conceived after she missed her publisher's deadline for delivery of 2014's *How to be Both*. That book was turned out by Hamish Hamilton in six weeks, in spite of a manuscript delivered a year late, and an unusual split structure by which the story begins either in present-day Cambridge or Renaissance Italy, depending on which of the two different (and simultaneously published) versions you happen to read.

The publisher's quick turnaround inspired Smith to finally embark on a project she had contemplated for 20 years: a quartet of novels, each themed after a season, designed to keep pace with the state of the nation in as close to real time as the publishing process allowed. *Autumn*, written during the Brexit referendum, appeared four months after the vote; now, four years later, comes *Summer*, set during the coronavirus outbreak, complete with references to Zoombombing, Black Lives Matter and Dominic Cummings's blog.

Chatty, allusive, punning, leaping between time frames and trains of thought, synthesising a vast amount of material from the past as well as the present, the style of the quartet could easily be described as a product of the digital age, were it not for a sense that it's the world that has

caught up with Smith rather than the other way round. Her distinctive voice was forged early in a decorated literary career that began in 1995. For an experimental writer, her appeal is broad, as became clear when *How to be Both* won both the Women's Prize and the Costa Book Award, seen as more populist literary awards, as well as the Goldsmiths Prize for fiction that pushes artistic boundaries.

Summer begins in February 2020, when coronavirus was still widely treated as an overseas news story, running through to deepest lockdown in May, via the Second World War. The large cast includes teenage siblings Sacha and Robert, whose riven family (their father lives with his girlfriend next door), is connected to Daniel Gluck, a part-German centenarian first seen in *Autumn*. As he's looked after by his neighbour during the pandemic, Gluck's thoughts drift back to his internment on the Isle of Man in 1940. There's also an elderly protester, Iris, seen in *Winter*, making room in her large house in Cornwall for homeless asylum seekers who, in the wake of Covid-19, have been released from an immigration removal centre run by SA4A, the fictional jack-of-all-trades contractor to whom the government outsources its dirty work.

Smith switches between direct authorial address and the characters' perspectives. She toggles between the various time frames, between interaction and introspection, ►

which often takes the form of mini-essays on everything from the migrating patterns of swifts to Einstein's spell in England on the run from the Nazis. She can also do dialogue-driven scenes: with a Donald Trump rally on television in the background, Sacha and her mother argue about plundering a hazily attributed quote from the internet for her school essay on forgiveness.

At the same time, it rarely feels like you're reading a novel. Smith's voice is conversational. "Here's something I once saw," she tells us. It's brisk, direct. "That was last night. This is the next morning." "I can't remember where this next quote you're about to read is from... I copied it into a notebook some years ago and now I can't find its source." Smith tells us what "everybody said" and then in the next line says, "Okay, not everybody said it. I'm speaking colloquially."

A repeated pun attempts to recuperate the word "so" as an open-minded conjunction rather than a jaded shrug ("so?") at statements of the world's ills. But it's easy to wonder if what we're reading is little more than Smith's compositional process transmitted directly to the page. Her method of incorporating material by having characters look things up online can leave these novels reading like the result of a free association session after reading the morning's headlines. We can be browbeaten into finding her dizzying associative leaps meaningful: when Sacha hears the panel on the gameshow *The Masked Singer* shout "take it off!" she thinks of how she once saw a "gang of men shouting it at a girl down near the pier."

"Smith doesn't go in for conventional scene-setting; if she wants to tell us something, she just tells us"

But at the same time, Smith's methods can feel revelatory: there's a vertiginous, century-spanning moment when Daniel hears a sound that reminds him of horses' hooves on the roads as he was growing up, only to be told it's the sound of wheelie suitcases dragged by people going to a neighbour's Airbnb rental property.

The quartet's theme, ultimately, is generosity. "Why would we do these things for people only when there is a virus and not all the time?" Sacha asks, considering Britain's policy of sheltering rough sleepers under coronavirus. There's a moral dimension to the simplicity of Smith's language, which can be childlike, or as if addressed to a child. When she writes of a time "when London was one of the many places having to rebuild themselves in those years nearly a lifetime ago, after the tens of millions of people of all ages across the world had died before their time," you sense it's because she's wary of the numbing shorthand of the phrase "World War II." In a similar fashion we hear of an asylum seeker "beaten up by government thugs in the country he ran away from because he wrote a blog about something governmental he disagreed with"—as if to spell out the detail would only serve to distract from the essential injustice.

Smith doesn't go in for conventional scene-setting; if she wants to tell us something, she just tells us. Rather than concoct a plot to illustrate the impact of the pandemic, she has Sacha write about "an old lady from across the road who went into a home last year, I don't want to key in the word died, but she did, she died. So did 12 other people in the home she was in, over one weekend, and a careworker, and the healthworker who saw the careworker, who had symptoms. And one of the teachers from the primary school down the road from here. And an NHS nurse my mother knew. It is so sad."

Sacha gets a text from her part-Chinese classmate Mel reporting how her dad punched someone who told her mum not to breathe near her children in Waitrose. There's mention of a Romanian care worker preparing to leave Britain after Brexit, and a Michelin-starred French chef doing the same. Smith hasn't hid her politics, criticising



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in an interview "the Tory inability to mend any of the social divisions that have become so visible." Sacha's Muslim friend Ayat is harassed after Boris Johnson's newspaper article likening veiled women to letterboxes. There's also mention of an English teacher using the word *Bildungsroman* being hit by a brick from a parent angry that he's not using "the Queen's English," which seemed to me less plausible.

Ali Smith CBE was the youngest of five siblings, raised in Inverness by parents who in their youth had been awarded scholarships they weren't able to take up under family pressure to earn. As a beneficiary of the 1962 Education Act, she has opposed tuition fees. She has spoken of how her family didn't own books but borrowed them. (Later she published a collection, *Public library and other stories*, that argued against library closures under austerity.) As a teenager she would watch European films at her local cinema. The Brexit vote nudged her instinctive suspicion of Scottish nationalism into cautious support in recognition that Scotland did not vote for Brexit.

Smith started to write fiction after a career begun in academia ended when she fell ill with chronic fatigue syndrome. A generously teacherly spirit animates her novels. At the centre of each book in the seasonal quartet is the work of an artist. Here it is the experimental Italian filmmaker Lorenza Mazzetti, who died at the age of 91 in January ("She's the filmmaker whose images I described earlier..."). Mazzetti was brought up in Tuscany by an aunt who was married to a cousin of Einstein; in 1944 the occupying Nazis killed her aunt and her children but spared Lorenza, whose surname wasn't Jewish. Later she came to London, where (as Smith entertainingly relates) she turned up at the Slade School of Art demanding to be accepted; she was.

You suspect that part of what interests Smith in Mazzetti is that, in the light of Brexit, her story is a symbol of British openness to



Inspiration: At the centre of *Summer* is Italian filmmaker Lorenza Mazzetti (above) who died at the age of 91 in January

incomers as well as support for cultural endeavour (Mazzetti received state funding via the British Film Institute). We read elsewhere about a German artist who during the pandemic checks his bank account “and found €9,000. €9,000! Where did it come from? From the German government to all that country’s artists and arts workers no strings attached.”

The purpose of art is much debated in these novels. At one point in *Summer*, one character, low during lockdown, is told she should be writing about “a too-late response from a distracted and useless government who never thought for a minute they’d end up governing anything” and “how the people who’ve never been properly valued are all holding this country together.” The speech is punctuated by an “uh huh,” a brief flicker of weary scepticism that the novel elsewhere doesn’t really permit.

“*Summer* is prepared for the charge of virtue signalling”

Smith is particularly careful not to satirise Sacha, who sends a series of letters about lockdown life to a detained asylum seeker from Vietnam whose name translates as Hero (he’s a virologist who warned of coronavirus). Sacha tells him that “you along with all the key workers in the NHS and the people working so hard keeping things

going... are my heroes, along with the people fighting to protect climate, and every single person protesting what happened to George Floyd.”

Summer is prepared for the charge of virtue signalling. “It got fashionable around then to act like you didn’t care. It got fashionable, too, to insist the people who did care, or said they cared, were either hopeless losers or were just showing off.”

The novel’s most interesting expression of Britain’s polarised politics perhaps comes in the character of Sacha’s 13-year-old brother, a Brexit supporter (in contrast to Sacha) who finds himself suspended from school after repeating things Johnson and Dominic Cummings have said. He resembles the baby in Smith’s short story “The Child,” in which a woman shopping in Waitrose is suddenly landed with a small child, who starts spewing forth sexist bigotry.

As a metaphor to explain the Brexit vote, this only goes so far, but Smith’s sequence has always seen the referendum and its fallout as the result of a disingenuous manipulation from a power-hungry elite. At one point in *Summer* someone describes seeing the subtitle of a news broadcast, the slogan “Get Brexit Done” rendered as GET BACK SIT DOWN.

Smith has said that “wishful thinking is all we’ve got,” observing that she was raised in an atmosphere of protest and regeneration. This quartet has something of the air of a rainbow tacked up in a window. Where that leaves us isn’t clear, but perhaps this is yet another sense in which this singular writer has found her moment.

Anthony Cummins is a critic and translator

Deaths by morning

Sarah Moss's uncanny fiction has an explosive combination of the historical and personal, writes *Catherine Taylor*

In a time of unrest and pandemic novelists are, if a slew of recent articles are to be believed, either gleefully priming their keyboards, cursing at finding themselves too deep into their current manuscript to change direction—or simply despairing. Who will write the definitive work for these “unprecedented times”? One that looks to the past while reconfiguring the future? (Ali Smith's effort is reviewed on p67.) The consensus is that a hot take from Ian McEwan will hit the shops in 2021. *Saturday* (2005), in which McEwan placed one comfortably-off London family at the heart of the protest against the Iraq war in spring 2003, was lauded as a definitive state-of-the-nation novel. Like it or loathe it, the novel still resonates 15 years later.

From 2016 until the virus struck, the political sphere was preoccupied with the at times agonising self-severing of the UK from the EU. Its effects have filtered their way into fiction, alongside the climate emergency threatening our planet. Sarah Moss has touched on both topics in her novels. She has come to represent a subtly different type of English writing from the direct engagement of McEwan—one which is taking more diverse and interesting forms than ever before. Moss's sixth novel *Summerwater* concerns itself with contemporary Britain in the aftermath of the Brexit vote. But like its immediate predecessor *Ghost Wall* (2018), its roots lie deep in remote time.

Set in a dilapidated Scottish cabin park near Loch Lomond over the course of one midsummer day and evening of relentless rain, *Summerwater* alights in turn on each of the very different people holidaying there. They are all given a distinctive voice—except a convivial young woman from Ukraine who is alone with her small daughter. The mother and daughter, viewed either benignly or with hostility by the other characters, will at the novel's end become the focus for an act of literal conflagration.

Interspersed with these accounts are brief chapters comprising lyrical and often ominous reports of the wild-life surrounding the human-made structures: the natural world is quietly suffering due to excessive changes in weather. “Under the hedges, in the hollows of small trees, birds droop and wilt, grounded, waiting. Small creatures in their burrows nose the air and stay hungry. There will be deaths by morning.”

Moss was born in Glasgow in 1975, but moved to Manchester as a young child. Her twin fictions *Bodies of Light* (2014) and *Signs for Lost Children* (2015) reimagined that English city through a family of artists and social reformers in the mid 19th century. Where *Bodies of Light* focused on the sacrifice of childhood and family life to art and exposing civic injustice, *Signs for Lost Children* is a more abstract work of alienation and identity, in which Ally and Tom, a newly married couple, are separated for six months when Tom, an engineer, goes off to build lighthouses in Japan, leaving his doctor wife Ally alone in stifling England. Both books were shortlisted for the Wellcome Prize, awarded annually to the best book centred on medicine or health.

Moss's next book, *The Tidal Zone* (2016), also nominated for the Wellcome, examined another city though its complex layers of history—this time Coventry, where she taught creative writing at the University of Warwick. In *The Tidal Zone*, in Moss's words “a book about war,” a family deals with the sudden life-threatening illness of a teenage girl, Miriam, in the modern-day Midlands. The beleaguered NHS, for which Miriam's mother works, plays a central role, and there is a parallel story following the post-war reconstruction of Coventry Cathedral. This is a specialist interest of Miriam's father Adam, a part-time academic who takes on most of the domestic responsibilities and anxieties usually reserved (at least in novels) for women. Reviewing the book in the *Guardian*, Penelope Lively called it a “novel for our times,” and it is notable that Lively, so adept at balancing family history and its consequences in her own fiction, should in turn champion Moss. Hilary Mantel has also given advance praise for *Summerwater*.

Families and the tensions between the individuals within them lie at the heart of Moss's writing. There is also a powerful connection to often-uncongenial landscapes, early human settlements and the ghosts—imagined or real—contained there. This plays into Moss's wider theme of national identity, which she has called “an invented tradition that depends on myths of origin.”

The explosive combination of historical and personal can lead to a kind of internecine warfare, most clearly expressed in Moss's last novel, *Ghost Wall*. An archaeological camp excavating Iron Age culture in Northumberland—in the summer before the fall of the Berlin Wall—uncovers not only ancient rituals but also present-day domestic abuse. Prehistoric and contemporary existence meld to create a chilling thriller, reminiscent of Moss's debut *Cold Earth* (2009), in which a team of archaeologists on Greenland bring to light not only a bygone Norse community but also their own terrifying sociopathy—even as a plague cuts them off from the outside world.

If *Cold Earth* was an apocalyptic start to Moss's career as a fiction writer, her second novel, *Night Waking*, softened the darker elements with a wry humour. Anna, a historian with two fractious children and an emotionally absent ornithologist husband, spends a summer on a remote Outer Hebridean island. The exhaustion of a run of nights with broken sleep are spliced with the discovery of small bones buried in the garden and the letters of a young nurse who came to the island in the late 19th century to investigate the high rate of infant mortality. The fear of isolation—whether sought or dreaded—dominates the book, and Moss (who in 2012 also published *Names for the Sea*, a memoir of her own young family's year in Iceland) almost comes full circle in her return to the far north with *Summerwater*.

Moss's work has an uncanny prescience. While *Summerwater* was written well before the coronavirus crisis, reading it during weeks of lockdown there is something all too familiar in the uneasy frustrations of her multigenerational cast of 12, incarcerated in damp cabins, enduring lashing rain, bored and on a knife edge.



Summerwater
by Sarah Moss
(Picador, £14.99)

Claire, a compulsive worrier, wastes a precious hour to herself without the children fretting over the hygiene of her family's rental. "She'll be more relaxed once she knows it's all clean, or at least until she knows the dirt is theirs." Justine, an avid runner priding herself on the energy she has retained up to her mid-forties and feeling superior to those who are less vigilant about their bodies, is nevertheless ignoring a recent health warning that may sharply curtail her active lifestyle.

Justine's daily 10km runs are observed by David, a retired doctor whose artist wife, Mary, is showing symptoms of early dementia. Mary and David are veterans of the holiday park to which they had brought their children for long-ago summer holidays. They lament the absence of unborn grandchildren, while David bemoans the referendum result: "How could the English be so stupid, he thinks again, pointlessly." The sullen weather reflects his resentment: "You'd think the sun will never shine again, that it's probably not even up there any more, is drifting away from us in disgust towards another set of planets."

Moss cleverly subverts expectations with the dual chapters of Milly and her fiancé Josh. Milly's far from politically correct mental distractions during an earnest lovemaking session are a welcome counteraction to the "ostentatious" rain; the fretful adoration Josh expresses, and their differing expectations of married life, make their future together look doubtful until the novel's denouement.

Sulky teenagers are represented by Alex and his sister Becky—the former's paranoia and turbulent hormones temporarily relieved by kayaking alone in the fathomless waters of the loch, underneath a dour "Scottish sky... better at obscenity than any human voice." That the session nearly ends in disaster is just one of Moss's warning flags, along with Becky's secret visits to a strange older man who sleeps in a tent at the edge of the cabin park. Lurking in the loch's depths is a forgotten history, a past as precarious as the current time: "the small boats of boys in every century who never came home, and the water holds the hand-stitches of their clothes and the cow-ghosts of their shoes and the amulets that did not help when they were needed."

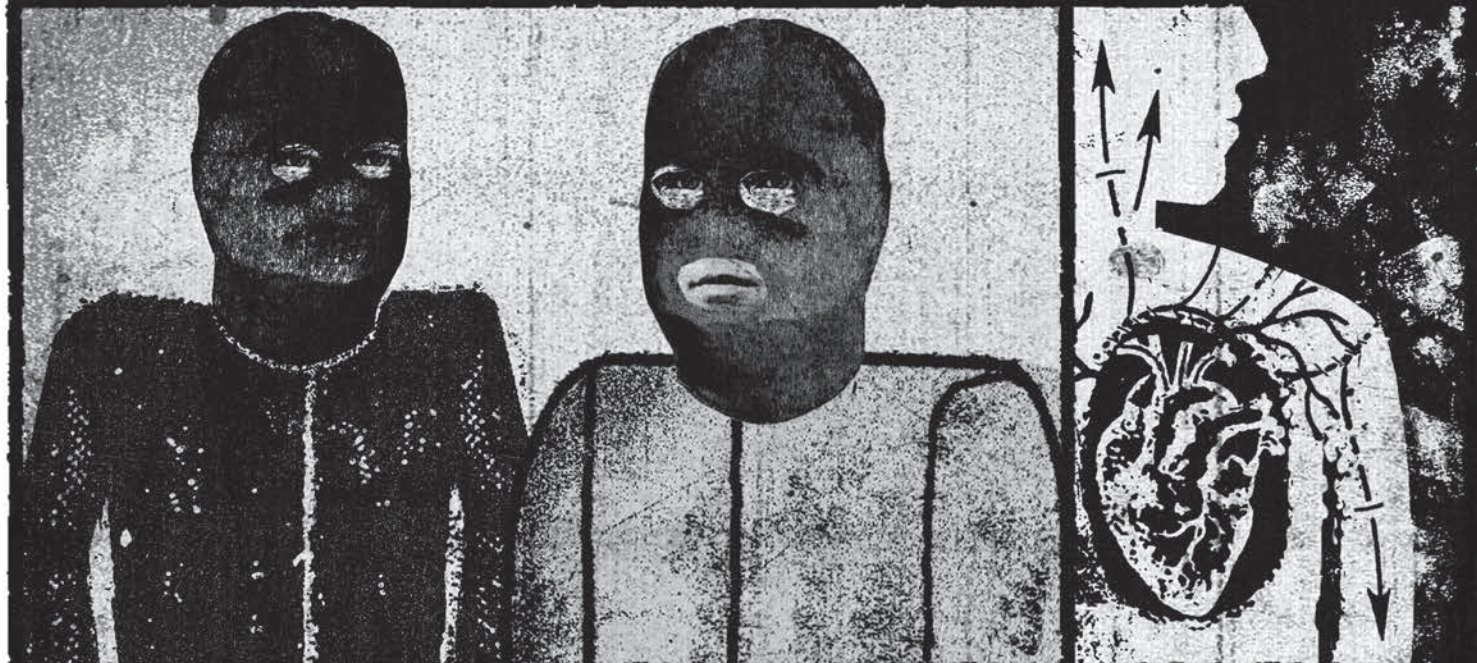
From these varied points of view, *Summerwater* re-examines some of the diverse themes of Moss's other novels in just over 200 pages. While fluent and absorbing, the effect of the multiple perspectives can sometimes be slightly diluting. Not always, though. The toxic masculinity so menacingly on display in *Ghost Wall* here briefly re-enacts itself in the figure of Justine's husband Steve. His unexpressed rage towards the Ukrainian woman in the nearby cabin, who is hosting a party with a steady stream of visitors, accelerates throughout the book. "He's not being racist," he tells himself, alternately silently cursing the woman for being Romanian, Bulgarian, or Polish by ignorant turns.

Cleverly, Moss reveals how such attitudes filter down into "innocent" childhood games turned cruel; the taunts of "where do you come from" uttered not by an adult but by a disturbed, angry child to another who is different and "foreign." The younger children are the key to the book: sensitive Jack, who narrates the final dramatic scene; Izzie, whose nighttime imaginary terrors are about to be realised; and Lola, who carries the heavy disappointments of someone twice her age, and is as cunning as a feral animal in human form. In Moss's assured yet brutal landscape, it is the wild, not the meek, who shall inherit the earth. **P**

Catherine Taylor is a freelance writer and critic and the former deputy director of English PEN

"Lurking in the loch's depths is a forgotten history, a past as precarious as the current time"







YOUNG OFFENDER

After leading a life of crime on the streets of South Kilburn, the narrator has to survive in the harsh environment of Feltham jail. Author Gabriel Krauze explains: “Often the truth is disturbing and ugly. Everything in this story was experienced by me in one way or another—otherwise I wouldn’t be able to tell it. It’s a world full of untold stories, a reality that most people only catch a glimpse of in the news and on TV, but which is lived by many on the edge of society’s gaze. This is the life I chose”

GABRIEL KRAUZE

ILLUSTRATIONS BY BEN JONES

And jump out the whip and I’m hitting the pavement and it’s this moment—when you jump out of the car and it’s too late to go back—when you know that you’re definitely gonna do it now, even though the way the adrenaline bursts through your body makes you wish for a second that you weren’t here. And now we’re creeping up the street, she’s too far ahead of us, we got the timing wrong but we can’t run to catch up because that will alert her and she’ll turn around, so we’re creeping fast. The bally is hugging my face tight and I’ve also pulled my hood over it and I feel the adrenaline explode in the pit of my chest like a dying star and it’s like my entire body has turned into the pumping of my heart.

And I’m creeping up fast to get behind her and Gotti is right there beside me and she hasn’t heard us, not the way we’re moving, low to the ground, black cotton Nike tracksuits on so there’s no sound of clothes rustling, Nike trainers silent on the pavement. And for a few heartbeats I notice how everything on the street seems like someone’s idea of a peaceful life, sun floating overhead, bulging in the sky’s belly, washing the street below in a brightness that breaks over everything; neat rows of perfect houses, polished green bushes lining the pavement, the cool metal smell of morning, and now the woman pushes a gate open and turns off the street and she’s walking up a small path to her front door.

And we’ve fucked up the timing but we can still get her on her doorstep so we start running, still tryna be stealthy but now we really have to be quick before we lose her and we turn through the little gate—she’s almost at the door, digging into her handbag for the house key—and we run up the path and then we’re right there behind her, I can reach out and touch her hair, I can smell shampoo and softness and then expensive perfume which almost makes me feel sick, and in this moment everything I’ve ever known falls away, memory, past, future, and then the street, the morning and everything else around us disappears as if I’m forgetting the world and there is only Now, crystal sharp, on the doorstep. And before I can get my arms locked around her neck to put her to sleep, she turns around.

And she screams. She sees me—or just my eyes and a bit of mouth through three holes in the black bally I’m wearing—as if realising a nightmare she didn’t know she was in and we know it’s all scatty now, fuck it, no chance of this being silent and unnoticed so I grab her anyway, my arm pushing into her throat as I turn her around and hold her tight against my chest and Gotti is trying to pop the Cartier off her wrist but he can’t for some reason, he’s proper straining and the metal is biting into her wrist and she’s screaming just take it just take it and now the pounding in my heart and belly is fully gone because we’re actually doing it, nothing else exists in this moment, everything is ►

still and calm inside me and I say stop fucking struggling in her ear but Gotti can't rip the watch off even though it's like she's giving him her wrist and I can see he's like whatdafuck because it's never happened before that he couldn't pop someone's watch off—and this one has diamonds going all round the bezel so we really want it, like it's easily worth ten fifteen bags.

And I think fuck it because she's already screaming, no point tryna put her to sleep now, might as well help Gotti. The front door—solid white with a brass knocker—opens and there's a boy standing there, about seventeen eighteen years old and he just stares at us like frozen and says Mum and I look at him, our eyes meet and in his eyes and also over his shoulder behind him I can see a different life to my own, something better maybe, something without so many sharp edges and broken things. And we're still tryna tear the watch off and suddenly Gotti turns round and bangs the woman's son in the face onetime and the boy drops and Gotti slams the door shut and we're alone with her again. And I clock she's got a big diamond ring on her wedding finger and I try to pull it off but it's not moving, the skin all bunches up and it hurts her and I can't twist it off because she has a wedding band on the same finger in front of the diamond ring, basically blocking it. So I snap her finger back, it folds straight over so the tip touches her wrist in one go and it's strange because I always thought that if you break someone's finger you'll actually feel the bones break, hear it even, but I don't feel anything at all, it's like folding paper, as if the finger was naturally supposed to bend back like that and she's screaming to me take it just take it but I can't, in fact within seconds I can see the break begin to swell up the base of her finger and now I know I'm definitely not getting the ring off. And the door opens again and there's a man standing there in a red sweater and we know it's all fucked now, we have to get away but we're still hoping we can at least cut out with something to show for our efforts and the man grabs his wife around her waist and pulls her towards him, drags her into the doorway while Gotti's like Snooz come, fuck this, we need to cut blood and he's turning away from the door ready to duss back to the whip which is waiting in the middle of the road and in my head I'm like fuck dat I'm not leaving with nothing. And the man drags his wife into the house and as he does this he's pulling the door shut and I can see their entrance hall is carpeted beige all thick and soft like the kind of carpet that holds the heat of a resting sunbeam so you actually wanna lie down and fall asleep on it and mad quick I reach through the door as it's closing and manage to grab the woman by her wrist and I pull her arm out just as the door is slamming shut and the man slams the front door hard on his wife's arm and I hear her scream. Gotti turns and runs down the path to the gate and I see through the slightly open door that the woman's dropped her handbag so I bend down and grab it quicktime and the door opens fully again and the man has a cricket bat which he swings at me but I'm already ducking down so it misses my head even though I feel the rush of air against my bally as it swipes past. I turn

**I TURN
AND RUN
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HANDBAG,
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PATH, OUT
THE GATE,
BUT THE
GETAWAY
WHIP ISN'T
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MOVING
SLOW DOWN
THE ROAD**

and run with the handbag, down the path, out the gate, but the getaway whip isn't there, it's already moving slow down the road, one of the back doors is wide open and Gotti is shouting for me to get in and the man is running after me waving the cricket bat above his head roaring mad rage—no words just pure noise—and I'm running after the whip, inhaling the morning, glass needles of sunlight piercing through the sky and falling all around me and I'm not sure I'm gonna make it, like I can't get level with the open passenger door, like nah this is so peak, it can't end like this, it can't. But then I do and I dive in head first onto the backseat and Gotti grabs onto me and—with my legs still sticking out—the car bursts forward down the road, Gotti pulls me in, reaches over me, slams the door shut and now Tyrell is driving us away.

We turn out of the street onto the main road and we're talking to Tyrell like whatdafuck, man couldn't get the belly fam, that was a mad ting, and I pull off my balaclava and Gotti pulls off his bally and it's like coming up for air after diving into some deep ocean and staying down there for so long that you hadn't realised you were drowning and Gotti says blood I don't know whatdafuck happened but I couldn't rip her watch off, I just couldn't, I kept trying but it wouldn't pop, and Tyrell says swear down fam? but he says it all flat and distant coz he's focusing mad hard on getting us out of the area quicktime, tension creasing his face and turning it ashy yellow, but on a real he's moving smart; not driving overly fast like it's some bate getaway, just driving like he's got somewhere he needs to be that morning. Plus the car looks right; nothing flashy, but at the same time not too battered or fucked up looking like it's obviously some second-hand ting that's gonna get burned out later.

As he drives back down the high road, past shops and the type of normal morning life that could be anywhere, a fed car comes screaming up the road on the other side, blue lights spinning off onto buildings and windows in pale slices that disintegrate in the morning brightness and me and Gotti slide off the backseat and lie down in the footwell because we know that police car was called for us. We lie there cramped up on the floor of the car, our legs pressing against each other, making sure it looks like there's no one on the backseat, heads down next to dirt and dust and I can see the detail of the rubber foot mat, which suddenly becomes something significant, its shape, texture, colour, its—

And the fed car flies past us in the opposite direction on its way to the street we left just a minute ago and I'm surprised as well, because you always hear how police response times aren't good enough and all that shit, but this was fast, I mean like the whole move itself couldn't have lasted more than three minutes really, I guess the son or the husband called the feds straight away while we were still clamping up the woman tryna rip her shit off, and true it's about ten in the morning, there's no traffic round here and what we've done is kinda fucking—well, no wonder they came for us so fast. But they never even notice Tyrell, never even look in the direction of our car and we're

well down the high road now. We sit back up. We're on our way back to the spot, we can be easy now, we've gotten away with it, they won't get us now.

Right. Krauze. Do you want the good news first or the bad news?

The good news I say.

Well the good news is that you're getting bail for the ABH he says, and I think calm, that's the worst of it over now, I can get ready to go.

The bad news is, because there's a warrant out for your arrest we're going to hold you here tonight and then you're going to Feltham Young Offenders Institution tomorrow morning.

Feltham. Fuck. And then I think oh well. Finally. HMP Feltham. Gang city and gladiator games. Everyone knows Feltham is greazy. Gotti told me about mandem getting their faces sliced on the wing when he was in Feltham. I remember he used the word chopped. Said he saw one yout chopping open a next yout's face. Not Nice mentioned suttin about window warriors. Taz told me about the fights in the showers, how he had to cave a man's head in coz if he didn't the same woulda happened to him. Nowhere to run or hide, just face to face with fate. If you're from London, it's mad easy to meet your enemies there, depending on what gang, what ends, what dons you might have beef with. Well now I'm gonna find out what it's really like. Fuck it. Knowledge is to be found on the edge of experience. As long as you don't fall off the edge...

In the morning they put me on a Serco van. The sweatbox. You get locked in this cubicle which isn't high enough to stand up in and there's only enough room to sit down on the moulded plastic seat. No room to stretch your legs forward, no room to stretch your arms out, no room to move and the windows are so heavily tinted it turns the day into night. No room here for words. No space to describe anything.

The van drives to Willesden Magistrates' Court to pick up some next prisoners. It gets there at midday which means I've spent over two hours in this box. My sweatshirt is stuck to my back. I get taken to a holding cell in the basement of the courthouse. Someone from the court comes and explains that I'm gonna get remanded in Feltham for two weeks and then brought back to Willesden Magistrates' coz the warrant is connected to me not doing community service and not attending probation linked to a case I had for assaulting police. Two weeks. I just wanna get to Feltham now forreal, all this getting taken here, put there; it's disorientating and tiring. Your face dries up and your belly churns but the food they bring to the holding cell is so shit—some microwaved nothing that seems to be

one with the plastic container it's in—that I don't even eat it. Anyway, food won't take away this feeling. I can hear next man getting put in the holding cells. More waiting, then taken out, handcuffed and put into cubicles on the Serco van. Early afternoon. The drive to Feltham takes another hour.

One moment I'm in Mile End, thinking about a lecture, zipping up my Avirex coz the wind's tryna wrap me up, thinking about what Nietzsche said, thinking about smashing one peng Somali ting I drew at the bus stop the other day, thinking about doing the next eat with Gotti and Big D, thinking I want some fried chicken or no I want a chicken doner wrap with garlic and chilli sauce on the meat and lots of burger sauce on my chips. And the next moment I'm locked

in this box, looking at my hands, making fists, wondering what Feltham's gonna be like, am I gonna have to swing it out with anyone on my first night? As soon as I can tell it's on, fuck a talking ting, I'm straight banging man in the face, even if I get fucked up afterwards. It's like Gotti said, you gotta ride it out, you gotta soldier that shit. Otherwise you'll come out damaged by the inability to be violent.

We are basically all products of each moment in our lives, sometimes becoming things we never knew we could be. When I go pen I'm gonna have to fold up all these other parts of myself and stash them away in the caves of my being. Then again people say there are so many parts to you, all these different sides to a person—the side that plays the piano, the side that writes and wants to write more, the side that thinks about ancient aliens creating the human race, the side that wants to shank man up and rob the rich and do this gang ting—but it's not really different sides or parts or pieces. It's all just

part of a whole. One thing. It's like imagine a gigantic column; you can't ever see all the way around it in one go, so people only ever get to see the side that's in their immediate view.

Anyway, I'm here.

Her Majesty's Prison Feltham. Dirty red bricks and barred windows that will never open. After the strip-search in reception—trousers off, boxers off, crouch, hold up your balls, cough—after getting booked in, after they take my clothes and I put on the prison-issue jeans and short-sleeve shirt with thin blue-and-white stripes going down it, after I pull the grey sweatshirt on top, after all that, I become prisoner TF6677 and get put on the induction wing with all the newcomers: a gang of tired faces, cardboard skin, hard stares and haunted eyes, anaesthetised emotions, expectations ripped out.

The wing is called Kingfisher. I have a cell to myself, up the stairs on the landing. They put everyone in cells on their own to avoid any beef on the first few nights. Blue metal doors. Yellow walls. Metal railings. Simple ►



words. Scratches in metal. Scratches in walls. Names, dates, postcodes. 3 the mandem, Kofi Real Killa woz ere '04, Fuck da feds, Pecknarm, Fuck OTF, Yung Steamer On Tour '03, Bridge Mandem, LOM Love Of Money, free Elka, N15, SW9 Real Ridaz: traces of lives lived in vicious moments. The good news and the bad news. Ha. The desk sergeant really fucked me up with that one.

In my cell. A metal bed frame with green sheets on it and a hard pillow. On the wall above the bed someone has written NO LOVE GANG. Toilet in one corner. Sink. Desk. Need paper and pen. Breakfast pack when they wake us up at 7am: prison cornflakes and carton of long-life milk. Put it on the windowsill next to the metal air vent to try and keep it cool. Screws check on you to make sure you're not sleeping during the day. If they catch you you get put on report. Lunch at 12pm. Dinner at 5pm. Prison food; I'm not gonna waste words on that shit. Fourteen hours from dinner to breakfast without food. Breakfast is such a minor ting that it's basically nineteen hours without a proper meal. Every day. Twenty-three hours locked up in my cell. There's something strange about this story like I can't even tell it because no amount of words can describe what it's really like. You can try and use evocative and complex words, try and be as detailed as possible but that just leads you further and further away from what it's like, because really it's all basic words, basic sensations that everyone can understand—cold, hard, empty, nothing—it's those words' limitations that sum it all up. And even all of this is a waste of words. Making it sound like more than it is because you're using words to keep describing it when it's all just deadout and there are thousands of other people going through the same process at that very moment.

Chatting to one brer from New Cross called Smiler on association. Live Every Day As Your Last tattooed on his neck. In my cell that night, I find the broken handle of a plastic toothbrush which someone started sharpening. I spend the night scraping it against the concrete floor until the job's finished. Rip a piece of my bedsheet and wrap it tight round the bottom for grip. Next day when I go out on association, I have the shank between my cheeks. I walk a bit slower and don't stretch my legs as much so that it doesn't fall out. We stand in a small tarmac yard with red-brick walls and barbed wire looming over and smoke burn for fifteen minutes. Some of the youts spit bars. I just stand and watch and taste the air. One screw gives us a talk about bullying and how if anyone feels like they're being bullied, they must report it to a screw so it can be investigated. Anyone with a bit of sense knows this would be the dumbest ting to do. If you report being bullied everyone will know you snitched and you'll be getting moved to on the regs, whatever wing you go to. Every

night I wash my boxers and socks in the sink in my cell with a bar of soap, then leave them to dry on this one hot pipe that runs through my cell. No one tells us anything about laundry or where to get clean garms.

In the showers during association, some youts from South are bunning a zoot. One tall white brer starts talking to me about some random shit while he dries himself with a towel—I've done trials for Arsenal he says out of nowher—and I can see he's fully gone. One of the South youts asks me where you from cuz? He offers me the zoot. Nah I'm cool blood. Twenty minutes later we hear low animal screaming in a cell on the ground-floor level. It's that white brer from the showers. Then banging like furniture getting broken and silence. A screw walks out of the cell and says wants to give it but can't handle it when he gets some back the whiny cunt. I don't see the white yout again.

I get pen and paper. Prison paper. Blue lines like the prison shirts. Number, Name, Wing; you have to fill it in if you're writing a letter. I draw one brer in an AV, holding a 9 mill and a MAC-10, baggy jeans and Nike Air Maxes and a fitted cap pulled down over his face with evil eyes embroidered above the brim. In the background I draw South Killy blocks as I remember them and fed cars with lights flashing and I write by Snoopz TF6677 HMP Feltham 02/12/06 Loyalty 2 the Hood. I show Smiler the drawing and he says that's sick cuz, do man a picture like that I beg, I wanna send it to my babymum.

The next morning I get moved off the induction wing with Smiler and couple next man to a wing called Mallard. Getting walked from one wing to the next, we go down brick corridors full of gloomy shadow with bits of light falling through bars, but it's like the gloom blocks the

light from coming anywhere near us. See next mandem with couple screws and they're all watching and fuck looking away even though you can feel the tension come into your face, the nerves in your arms and legs beginning to twitch. You can tell who's not shook coz they almost look like they're enjoying themselves. They stare and their teeth show. Gates open. Keys rattle. Metal on metal. Now I'm on Mallard.

In prison talk, doing bird means doing your time. When you get sentenced you get birded off. What a mad ting that every single wing in Feltham is named after a bird. Kingfisher, Mallard, Wren, Raven, Osprey, Kestrel, Heron. Pisstake. I hear that Raven and Osprey are the greaziest wings where it kicks off every day. Bare murderers and lifers. Man are getting shanked up on the regs on dem wings deya says one brer I'm talking to. He wants to go to Raven coz his boys are there and he's moving salty coz he's with the newbies. All around the prison grounds are peacocks. Real talk. You see them through your cell window, showing off their feathers, unreal colours like the



eyes of some mythical beast. You see them through the windows when you're out on association. Sometimes you hear them cawing high and loud in the loneliness of night. Mad ting ah lie?

One night, voices shouting from cell to cell.

Oi number 20, come to your window blood.

What?

What d'you mean what? I'll break your fucking face blood, don't get me mad.

Allow it.

Haha myman said allow it you know.

Other voices laughing.

Yo number 20, you still there?

Yeah.

Yo suck your mum.

Blood allow talking about my mum. My mum's dead innit.

Suck your dead mum then.

Oh my days allow me.

Shutup man.

Yo number 20 sing me a song.

What?

I said sing me a fucking song pussyole, otherwise watch what happens when the doors open tomorrow.

What song?

Sing me happy birthday.

He starts singing.

Laughter echoing around the wing. Mandem banging on their cell doors.

Sing it properly blood.

I'm sitting on the stairs during association—forty-five minutes out of our cells every afternoon—chatting to Smiler and some next brer from South. Then I zone out of the conversation coz I start thinking about Gotti. True I'm glad he never got shift with me coz he woulda ended up going bin for way longer than me. I wonder what moves he's doing. He better not hit that super belly without me.

Something happens around the pool table. One tall brer with mini dreads jumps over the table, grabs one next yout's head and smashes it off the concrete edge surrounding a cell door. The brer crumples like a puppet that suddenly got its strings cut. Someone says rah, myman got moved to. Blood smears the cell door as he slides down against it. Some next yout kicks the brer in the face and pulls off his trainers, tucking them under his sweatshirt. The brer on the floor goes stiff and starts shaking. Then the screws are everywhere shouting GET BACK TO YOUR CELLS, siren going off, cell doors slamming and association is cut short.

In my cell I start thinking about uni. I'm meant to be handing in my main pieces of work for the end of the first term today and they don't even know where I am. I think about the fuckery of how I got here. People like me who go from zero to one hundred real quick will always have to face consequences. Now I'm missing out on doing my final essays which I know will damage my chances of getting a First for my degree. Pissed. But more than that I miss the roads. Real talk

**IN PRISON
TALK, DOING
BIRD MEANS
DOING YOUR
TIME. WHEN
YOU GET
SENTENCED
YOU GET
BIRDED OFF.
WHAT A MAD
TING THAT
EVERY SINGLE
WING IN
FELTHAM IS
NAMED AFTER
A BIRD**

I don't feel no way about anything I've done so far. It's easier to die than to live with regret. Sometimes I think it would be more painful to feel regret than it would be to get stabbed or shot.

Night presses its cold forehead against my window. I get a letter from Yinka. It's been opened already and stamped HM Young Offenders Institution Remand Centre Received 5 Dec 2006. There's no letter, just a passport photo of us together. It makes me smile and then I catch feelings so I put it away.

The next day, a screw comes to my door and tells me to get ready for a visit. It's Mama and Capo. In the visiting room I don't know what to say so I ask Mama to contact my advisor at uni and to tell her what's happened with me. She looks around, says it's not bad here at all and I say well you don't get to see the bit where I have to watch out for getting stabbed in the showers and Capo says chill Snoopz chill. I'm bare happs to see him and it just makes me wanna get out of here more. Families huddle around their sons, talking in low voices. Girlfriends lean over tables to kiss their boyfriends. They grip each other's hands. Some even have their children there.

As Mama and Capo leave, three screws rush across the room and grips up one brer and his chick, and there's a package all wrapped up in clingfilm like a tube on the floor. Probably had it hidden in her pussy and tried passing it over but flopped. She's screaming her head off as they take her down.

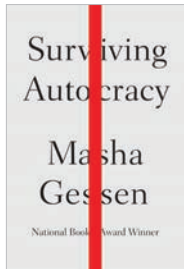
They bend up her man and take him out of the visiting room. Fuckinell. This place has everything. Love, violence, sacrifice, longing, oppression. Everything and nothing. I'll be out in a few days anyway.

When they take me back to Willesden Magistrates' for a hearing, the numbness is there within me, muffling the outside world even as I get brought back into it. I get sent off for a probation review. The probation officer has only one arm and the sleeve of his suit jacket is pinned up around the stump. Eyes like rusty hooks and tea-stained teeth. I say I'm doing an English degree at Queen Mary University and he says so what? I've got two degrees. I consider banging him in the face and trashing the room but I need to go home. The magistrate gives me new curfew conditions, this time without putting me on tag. I have to report to Paddington Green police station every week and do 250 hours of community service. Bun dat. Anyway, I'm free to go. The day feels detached. I'm oil on water. Nah I'm frozen, waiting to melt back into normal life. **P**



This is an edited extract from Gabriel Krauze's novel "Who They Was," which will be published by Fourth Estate in September

Books in brief



Surviving Autocracy

by Masha Gessen (*Granta*, £12)

“Crazy” and “idiotic” are some of the words often bandied about in polite conversation when describing Donald Trump. But what if these words are excusing a president who recently shared with his 83m Twitter followers a video featuring an elderly man shouting “white power”? This is the reality journalist Masha Gessen masterfully tackles in *Surviving Autocracy*.

Gessen’s 25 years reporting on authoritarian regimes has taught the journalist something: ignoring a tyrant will see you damned. The Russian-born writer has already lived through one autocratic regime where LGBT communities and dissenters are actively censored and purged—Vladimir Putin’s Russia. Gessen draws on the experience of being a reporter in Russia and Hungary to describe America under Trump. Terms such as “presidential” would not usually be used by those living outside of Russia to describe that country’s leader. So why use them when talking about Trump and his policies?

Gessen argues that the language of political disagreement and partisan discussion can no longer be applied to a president who has showered scorn on mainstream politics. According to Gessen, factions of the American media, desperate to return to a time before Trump, have fallen into a trap of normalising racism, lies and totalitarian tendencies. News commentators highlighted the brief moments when Trump was “presidential” such as his speech following missile strikes against Syria in April 2017.

The reluctance of the editors at National Public Radio to use “liar” and “racist” to describe the president saw them transform into accomplices. Journalists lost sight of moral clarity. Only through comedy and podcasts, where opinions and critical analysis are welcomed, is the president treated as a “phenomenon that is distinct from both our experience and our expectations of politics.” With the election months away, Gessen’s latest work couldn’t be more on point.

Emily Uchida Finch



Prisoners of History: What Monuments to the Second World War tell us about our History and Ourselves

by Keith Lowe (*William Collins*, £16.99)

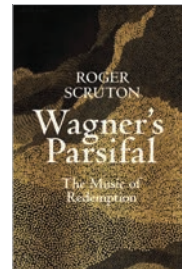
This new book is well timed, although it focuses on symbols of the Second World War—from China to Russia, the Philippines, Lithuania, Hungary and Japan. These are the monuments, sculptures, parks and tombs built to mark “a titanic struggle between good and evil” between 1939 and 1945.

Lowe’s focus runs deeper than mere aesthetics. While the Rhodes Must Fall campaign has gained traction and Poland removed its monuments to Communism, he notes that, globally, few wartime statues have been toppled. Curious, when “British and French leaders were just as much champions of colonialism... American leaders still presided over a racially segregated army; and men from all the Allied forces engaged in acts that would now be considered war crimes.”

The period is steeped in “cosy memories” that risk becoming “a trap, from which escape seems impossible.” The 1991 Katyn memorial in New Jersey is unflinching in its depiction of the 1940 massacre of 22,000 Polish officers by the Soviets—its 34ft of bronze shows a soldier speared through the back with a bayonet. It represents not only the atrocity of the executions but the sense of betrayal felt later by Poland after its army had fought for the Allies but received little subsequent aid from them. A recent bid to move the statue ignited a battle between local councillors and Polish Americans.

By contrast, the “Four Sleepers” in Warsaw, erected in 1945 to mark the “new era of friendship” between Poland and the Soviet Union was removed permanently 70 years later, branded “a monument to shame.” America’s tendency is to cast its heroes as “triumphant,” while Europe’s is to portray melancholy victims. It is this “war over memory” that pervades a prescient work on commemoration that questions who we choose to celebrate and why.

Zoë Apostolides



Wagner’s Parsifal: The Music of Redemption

by Roger Scruton (*Allen Lane*, £20)

It is fitting that the final book by Roger Scruton, who died in January, should be about Richard Wagner’s final opera. Scruton has already written books on the Ring Cycle and *Tristan und Isolde*, finding richness in both the philosophy and music of the great German composer. Sexual longing, sacrifice and the power of compassionate love—recurrent themes in Wagner—are distilled in *Parsifal*, which resembles a trance-like religious ceremony more than a conventional dramatic work.

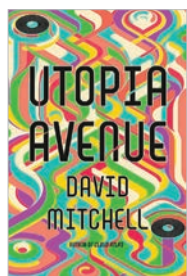
For many this makes it a patience-testing work—its first act is as long as most operas. It is also a controversial one. Modern opera directors have seen its medieval knights not as heroes but precursors of blood-and-soil fascists, and the figure of Kundry, who wanders the earth after cursing Christ, as combining anti-semitism and misogyny.

Scruton is having none of that. Instead he links the character of Parsifal—a “pure fool”—to the ideas of self-sacrifice in René Girard and pollution in Mary Douglas. Wagner, he writes, “understood, as few before or after him have understood, that the sacred, the sacrificial and the sacramental are aspects of a world-changing endeavour.”

His retelling of the plot will be useful to anyone seeing the opera for the first time, though it is hard work on the page. In truth, Wagner’s stories are less interesting than the astonishing music he weaves from them. And here Scruton is a masterful guide: the leitmotifs, or repeated themes, that form and re-form throughout the piece, are broken down expertly. The “shimmering veil of orchestral sound,” as exemplified by the gleaming prelude, anticipates “the sound-world of Schoenberg” in the 20th century, as well as the techniques of film scoring.

If there is one overwhelming theme of *Parsifal* it is compassion for the weak—including animals. It is a delicious irony that Scruton, the arch supporter of hunting, here admires the gentler side of Wagner.

Sameer Rahim



Utopia Avenue

by David Mitchell (Sceptre, £20)

Famous people flit butterfly-like through the pages of David Mitchell's latest novel, set in London during 1967's so-called Summer of Love, from John Martyn to Petula Clark to rising star David Bowie. They go to parties, get high, occasionally play music. But the story is about pop stardom only insofar as it's an adjunct to happiness and freedom. Certainly, Elf, Jasper, Dean and Griff, the young musicians who make up the band Utopia Avenue, relish their brush with fame: hit records, shows in NYC and San Francisco, an expanding fanbase, sex with beautiful strangers.

Utopia Avenue is a comfort read, a fictional equivalent of a "rock 'n' roll years" documentary. Music fans will enjoy checking facts. Mitchell fans will delight in re-encountering characters from past books. Everyone will find the first three quarters great fun with its well-crafted characters, period detail (bus-window travelogues reminding us how un-Swinging most of London actually looked) and a rags-to-riches plot.

In his set pieces on live gigs and recording sessions, the author just manages to swerve around the clichés of rock criticism. But stereotypes are admitted, from Griff's gruff northernness to the slimy DJs and record store owners that hang around the music industry. You wonder if Mitchell, given the experimental form of previous works, is being playful—building up Sixties pop tropes for a final act of subversion.

What dooms Utopia Avenue (the band) in the end, though, is a very ordinary event. So ordinary, in fact, it's a bit disappointing. The superstar cameos are red herrings; this band is merely unlucky.

It takes huge skill to pen a tale in which not one but four individuals are on a hiding to nothing. Mitchell possesses the virtuosity to pull it off. While this novel is no literary earthquake, its combination of deft storytelling, artful music journalism and rigorous rendering of a much-mythologised era proves strangely addictive.

Chris Moss



Italian Life: A Modern Fable of Loyalty and Betrayal

by Tim Parks (Harvill Secker, £16.99)

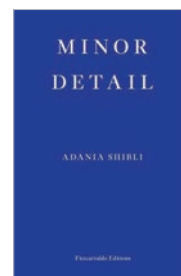
For those not privy to its secret rules, building a career in Italy can be disorienting. In his new novel, Tim Parks attempts to describe to international readers the rather obtuse systems of clientelism that underpin professional life in his adopted homeland.

The book follows Valeria, a young girl from the southern region of Basilicata who has moved to Milan to become an academic. Despite having no family connections to rely on, and no contacts of her own, she attempts to rise through the ranks of a mid-level university. Valeria meets James, an aging English professor with degrees from Oxford and Yale who is struggling to win the favour of his Machiavellian colleagues. Parks makes use of these two outsiders to show how important informal hierarchies are to Italian society, from navigating its labyrinthine bureaucracy to staying on the right side of its legal system.

Most of this could be told in the form of a memoir or essay. Here instead Parks has chosen to compose a fairy tale filled with allusions to folk stories and religious parables. The supporting characters—the other professors, secretaries, treasurers and so on, are “realistic” to a point—but they also fit into archetypal roles, as paladins, spies, jesters, witches. In one chapter, Parks presents Ottone, the villainous university rector, as an ogre. It's an irreverent approach, one which enables Parks to reinterpret his source texts, like *Pinocchio*, as a warning about the pitfalls of conformism, or Giamattista Basile's *The Tale of Tales*, as a guide to succeeding in office politics.

While heavy-handed at times, and occasionally exaggerating how medieval Italian life really is, this is an engaging take on a potentially dry subject. For those who know the country well, the book offers a well-observed analysis of its less attractive elements. For those who don't, it's worth seeking out for its insightful exposé of the subtle forms that corruption can take.

Jamie Mackay



Minor Detail

by Adania Shibli, translated by Elisabeth Jaquette (Fitzcarraldo, £10.99)

Sitting in her office in Ramallah, as the Israeli Defence Forces raze a neighbouring building to the ground, the unnamed narrator of Palestinian author Adania Shibli's new novel observes that to see the “minor detail” is to “see the fly shit on a painting and not the painting itself.” The “minor detail” she is referring to is the precise date of the gang-rape and murder of a young Bedouin woman in the Negev (or in Arabic *naqab*) desert during the 1948 Palestinian exodus, exactly 25 years before her own birth. The major details have already been revealed to the reader in the first half of the novel, which closely follows the actions of an Israeli sergeant involved in the crime.

Such minor details are the “only way to arrive at the truth and definitive proof of its existence,” says the narrator, amid the “roar of occupation.” And so she goes on a dangerous journey that takes her from official museums to archives, referring to maps both obsolete and new which sometimes do—and sometimes do not—detail checkpoints, boundaries and walls. She is searching for something elusive: the kind of oral testimony that sits as a counter to sweeping historical narratives.

What Hannah Arendt identified as the “banality of evil” was marked, for the philosopher, by the failure of thought. Within systems of oppression, victims are denied an ability to think lucidly about their own agency as social and political beings. This is true of both the Palestinian and Israeli characters in Shibli's novel.

A palpable sense of dread pulses beneath *Minor Detail*, heightened by the everyday textures of soapy water on hands, the sounds of dogs and camels groaning, the smell of petrol, minor details that repeat uncannily in both narratives. In Elisabeth Jaquette's fine translation from Arabic, Shibli asks how we can account for and understand major crimes, by looking more closely for the details that escape.

Saba Ahmed

Recommends

Art

Emma Crichton-Miller

Titian: Love, Desire, Death

National Gallery, until 17th January 2021

Having led the way in reopening its doors, the National Gallery has extended its Titian exhibition. What better reintroduction to the power of painting than seven mythological canvases inspired by Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, created by Titian for Philip II of Spain? Besides the luscious women, storm-tossed woods and cobalt skies, pellucid pools and roiling seas, these are fiery expressions of drama and emotion. Titian called them poetry in paint.

Hyundai Commission: Kara Walker, Fons Americanus

Tate Modern, 27th July to 8th November

Kara Walker's satirical installation appeared in the Turbine Hall last year, but it has now accrued unexpected resonance. This monumental working fountain, modelled on the memorial to Queen Victoria in front of Buckingham Palace, and made from recycled materials, is an irreverent symbol of the intertwined histories of Africa, Britain and America. Walker welcomes us: "Come One and All to Marvel and Contemplate the Monumental Misrememberings of Colonial Exploits Yon."

We Will Walk: Art and Resistance in the American South

Turner Contemporary, Margate, 22nd July to 6th September

The Civil Rights period of the 1950s and 1960s shaped an entire culture. This show presents works created in that cauldron of poverty, segregation and resistance, many never before seen in Europe. These sculptural assemblages of salvaged materials, paintings and quilts, created by over 20 African-American artists between 1950 and today, have become essential viewing.



Theatre

Michael Coveney

Hamlet/The Cherry Orchard

Theatre Royal, Windsor, dates to be confirmed, August to September

The first "live" theatre since March features Ian McKellen as both Hamlet (50 years after he first played him) and the decrepit retainer Firs in Chekhov's *Cherry Orchard*. If theatres open for business in July or August, this season, directed by Sean Mathias, will be first off the starting blocks. Jenny Seagrove is Gertrude and Ranevskaya; Missy Malek a young Ophelia. McKellen, 81, is easily the oldest actor to play Hamlet, beating Frank Benson who was 72 on his farewell tour in 1930.



Six

Livenation.co.uk, 4th August to 12th September

The 75-minute musical (above) in which Henry VIII's six queens rock out has been a hit on the Edinburgh Fringe and in London, but fell victim to the pandemic before its Broadway opening in March. It returns as a drive-in live performance with band at 12 sites across the UK including Bristol, Edinburgh, Bolton, Leeds, London, Newmarket and Cheltenham. You can picnic and party with up to seven people in each of 300 vehicles allowed per show.

Greenwich + Docklands International Festival

Various outdoor venues, 28th August to 12th September

Live theatre will mostly restart outdoors, and there are several al fresco festivals confirmed for the late summer and autumn, notably the 25th anniversary Greenwich + Docklands celebrations. Spread through streets and parks, the programme includes durational installations celebrating the NHS, circus and street theatre, and a dance programme at Canary Wharf with distancing integrated into the performance.

Classical & opera

Alexandra Coghlan

A Feast in the Time of Plague

Grange Park Opera, dates to be confirmed, September

The ever-enterprising Grange Park Opera has plunged into the post-Covid landscape with a series of firsts—and now a premiere. Broadcast free on its website, *A Feast in the Time of Plague* pairs veteran librettist David Pountney with award-winning young composer Alex Woolf in a new adaption of Pushkin's tragedy. Twelve friends sit down for a lavish dinner in a plague-ridden city but not all get up. A starry British cast is led by tenor Peter Hoare, soprano Susan Bullock and bass Clive Bayley.

In the Market For Love

Glyndebourne, 12th to 28th August

Glyndebourne is bringing audiences back to its beautiful gardens for a short season. Headlining is Offenbach's giddy one-act comedy *Mesdames de la Halle*—or *In the Market For Love*, in this new translation. Set in Paris's bustling fruit-and-vegetable market it packs secrets, love and plenty of produce into its short duration. The season opens with concerts by the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment performing Beethoven, Mozart and Jonathan Dove.



Ravenna Festival

ravennafestival.org, 21st June to 23rd July

A 15th-century fortress, an 18th-century market square and Unesco-listed basilica—these are just some of the venues for Italy's Ravenna Festival, whose many concerts, talks and events will all be live-streamed for free. Artists appearing include award-winning pianist Beatrice Rana, cellist Giovanni Sollima, and music from Purcell, Leonard Cohen, Josquin, Mozart and more.

Film

Wendy Ide

How to Build a Girl

Amazon Prime Video, 24th July

Based on journalist Caitlin Moran's semi-autobiographical novel, *How to Build a Girl* is like *High Fidelity* for teenage girls; a comic coming-of-age riot that feels like it was scrawled in mascara and hair dye on the back of an exercise book. American star Beanie Feldstein mangles the Wolverhampton accent a little but captures the exuberant spirit of Johanna, a meek 16-year-old who reinvents herself to become Dolly Wilde, a rock critic with a gift for elegantly phrased vitriol and a reputation for savagery to rival Genghis Khan.

Babyteeth

Released in August

Terminal disease meets teen romance. It's not the most promising premise, conjuring images of Hollywood tear-jerkers. But this sparky Australian drama, with its scrapbook structure and crackling rebellious tone, is something special. Eliza Scanlen, recently seen as the mild-mannered Beth in *Little Women*, cuts loose as Milla, a gravely ill teenager who terrifies her parents by falling in love with a small-time drug dealer with facial tattoos. Unexpected music choices on the score bring a bittersweet sense of optimism.



Sound of Metal

Released on 4th September

Music is more than just a job for drummer Ruben (an incredible performance from Riz Ahmed, above). It's his identity and the saving grace that replaced his drug addiction. So when he suffers catastrophic hearing loss, he has to learn not only to contend with disability, but also to reshape his sense of self. This is a thrilling debut which uses every cinematic tool available—in particular innovative sound design—to immerse us in Ruben's experience.

Television

Chris Harvey

The Rise of the Murdoch Dynasty

BBC Two, 14th July

"I don't believe that David Cameron or Tony Blair really dared cough without getting permission first from Rupert Murdoch," says the actor Hugh Grant in this fascinating three-part exploration of the international media empire created by the Australian-born mogul. Murdoch's political influence, from the *Sun* to Fox News, has been profound. Fans of HBO's *Succession*—partly based on the clan—can compare and contrast with the children who will inherit the Murdoch billions.



The Plot Against America

Sky Atlantic, July

The creators of the masterpiece *The Wire*, David Simon and Ed Burns, are behind this adaptation of Philip Roth's 2004 novel. It imagines an alternate history, in which the aviator Charles Lindbergh—who in real-life opposed US intervention and aid to Britain in the Second World War—becomes president and turns America towards fascism. It's told through the eyes of a working-class Jewish family in New Jersey, based on Roth's own, and features Winona Ryder and John Turturro (above) as Rabbi Lionel Bengelsdorf, who sells his soul to Lindbergh.

Africa season

BBC

This mini-season of programmes includes a film about African literature presented by David Olusoga as well as a three-part series about African art hosted by Afua Hirsch. Traditional African art has had an enormous impact on western artists from Picasso to Basquiat, but contemporary African works are only now beginning to achieve high prices at auction, led by Nigerian painter Ben Enwonwu, who died in 1994. A timely introduction.

Podcasts

Charlotte Runcie

Blocked and Reported

barpodcast.fireside.fm

Journalists Katie Herzog and Jesse Singal seek out the most feverish and inflammatory things online—the latest people to be cancelled, publicly shamed or generally set the internet aflame—and try to see the funny side and provide some perspective. They take a left-leaning view, but at heart they're mostly just witty internet cynics who are nevertheless addicted to being online, and try to find interesting insights about human nature in amongst the "dumpster fires" of rage and nonsense.

Black Women Working

blackwomenworking.com

Black Women Working, which launched in 2019, centres black British women talking about employment and careers in the UK, with discussions covering rates of earnings, discrimination, career progression, microaggressions and more. The four-strong presenting team of Natalie, Tolu, Chantelle and Rachel—from a range of professional backgrounds including law, teaching, management and the arts—have created a space for conversations about equality and diversity, and for black women to share experiences and ideas for how best to succeed at work.

Cults

parcast.com/cults

New cults spring up all the time and exploit people in new ways, while mostly using the same ancient techniques of manipulation, induced euphoria and peer pressure. This fascinating podcast explores various specific cults and tells the stories of how they got started and grew their followings, how they practise and recruit, and who the leaders are. Each week there are examinations of the psychology behind the people who join cults, and the people who lead them.



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Prospect life

Illustrations by Kate Hazell



Home front

Singular bonds

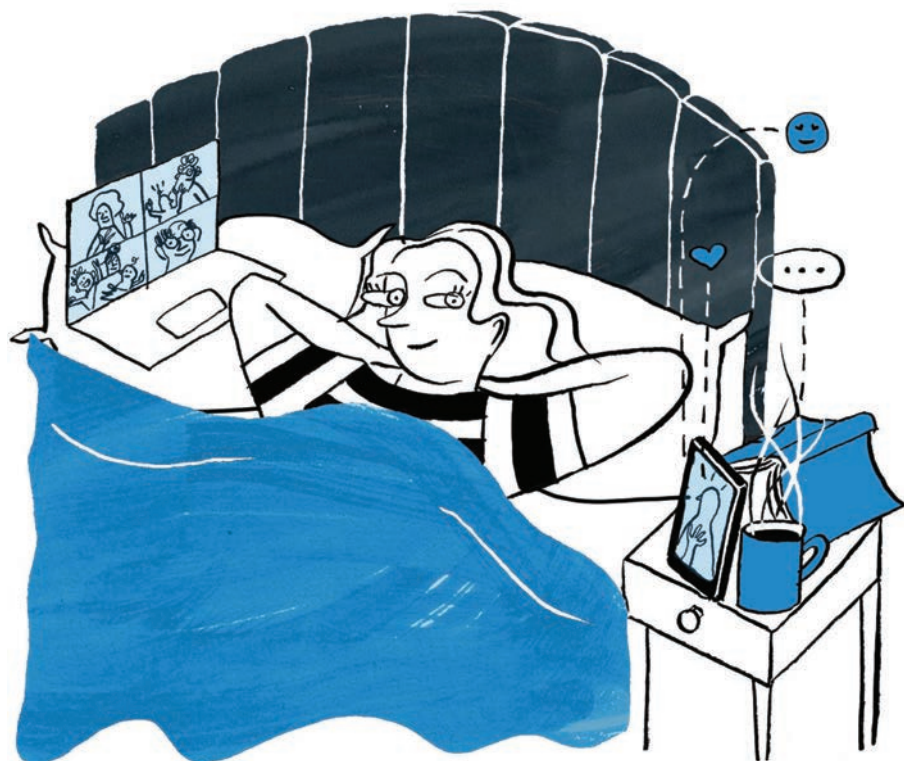
Hephzibah Anderson

The single are used to their private lives being deemed less private than those of their coupled peers. We become adept at sidestepping interrogations from older relatives and accustomed to performing comedy turns at dinner parties, serving up dire online dating debacles as amuse-bouches. When you're unattached, everyone has a view on your relationship status, and what it boils down to is this: it needs to be changed, quick.

And it's not just dinner parties: the pressure to pair up is everywhere. Switch on the radio or fire up Netflix, and a torrent of cheesy lyrics and rom-coms will leave you in no doubt that partnering up is what life is about. It's still, for most, where family begins. The "relationship" is presented as a panacea to whatever ails the soul.

Lately, it's seemed that pop balladeers and great auntie Sue have found a sly new ally: Covid-19. At the first virtual Downing Street press briefing back in March, Jenny Harries, Deputy Chief Medical Officer for England, joked about starting a new career in relationship counselling by suggesting that those living alone could "test" their nascent relationships and move in together in time for lockdown. Then came June's #sexban, a hashtag born after the government made explicit what was surely already a given: no sleepovers allowed.

Accustomed though we singles are to having our intimate lives discussed publicly, this intrusion reached surreally disquieting levels. Our government wasn't alone. In the Netherlands, an equally interfering official took the opposite tack and advised people to find a "sex buddy." It served to highlight the prudence that so often characterises interest in the exploits of the lonely-hearted.



When we talk of relationships, we refer overwhelmingly to romantic relationships. While in recent years words like "marriage" and "partner" have gone through radical shifts, the word "single" remains largely unreconstructed, its meaning defined through lack, especially where women are concerned. Bachelors have historically been indulged but spinsters are figures of pity at best, their cobwebbed images updated with gaudy, Bridget Jones-style clichés.

"There is a certain poetry—romance, you could say—to a life lived singly"

But that overlooks the richness of lives lived unpartnered, and obscures, too, the range of human bonds that we all crave. The single may be going without one particular flavour of intimacy, yet their lives are often emotionally full. And as anyone who's ever found themselves stuck with the wrong person knows, loneliness is most acute when you're lying wide awake at 3am, inches away from an oblivious, slumbering other.

There is a certain poetry—romance, you could say—to a life lived singly. It's full of possibility. Its pleasures aren't about the freedom to indulge every whim, either. You may not be quite as time-blessed as the married imagine, but there is still space to deepen friendships and expand social networks. And the single have formed their own families, too—families of choice, in which friendship can prove just as resilient as blood ties.

Nevertheless, our single years continue to be read as prologue rather than a full story. This seems a shame, since, even if that turns out to be true—and for an increasing number it doesn't—there is still much to be relished in a life lived alone, not least the ability to pay attention to different kinds of relationships rather than expecting that *one* person to comfort and challenge, amuse and arouse. As those in all but the most blissful unions have learnt, looking to one person to fulfil so many contradictory roles is wildly unrealistic. And yet, many still do, neglecting support from family and platonic friendships.

Lockdown experienced with a family, or even just with your significant other, is obviously very different to lockdown with your cat. In other respects, though, it ►

has been a leveller. Traditionally, those who've found their "person" suffer from less anxiety; but this year's ubiquitous online doom-scrolling has put paid to that. As for sex, it has apparently been slipping off the menu everywhere: according to one survey, almost half of couples living together during lockdown said they were having less sex than usual. And however tired singles are of their own company, it seems fair to assume that many a partnered soul is now badly in need of a break from their one and only.

Will the past few months turn out to have had an enduring impact on our approaches to intimacy, romantic or otherwise? A recent survey of dating app users found that 46 per cent had come to value "extended courtship," saying they intend to continue spending more time getting to know someone over online calls and messages, even when instant meet-ups are permitted again. The real test is probably this: granted the chance to take lockdown flirtations offline, how many singletons chose to catch up with relatives or best friends instead?



The wild frontier

Winds of change

Cal Flynn

At the beginning of lockdown, I heard a lot of discussion about the "new normal": what everyday life might look like after all this was over. Sometimes predictions were practical—we'd choose barbecues over dinner parties, classrooms would be half empty—but more often, the phrase invoked some utopian ideal.

Some spoke of lockdown as a kind of corrective. We couldn't have gone on the way we had before, the argument went: our globe-trotting, fuel-guzzling existence saw us visiting too many people and doing too many things, exhausting ourselves and polluting the world as we did so. Might a period of isolation and local living force us to take stock of our lives and pare back?

My initial reaction was scepticism: could we really expect to emerge from a pandemic (and the resultant economic downturn) happier and better rested? That gloomy



attitude followed me through the next few weeks as I swung back and forth between obsessively reading the news on my phone to ignoring it completely.

A lot has been written about the solace of nature, and I've always understood those consolations as ones of escapism. Switch off your phone, forget your cares. But as I picked my way along the coastal path each day, I began to understand that going outside offered me something else as well: a new way of looking at the world. I found myself reframing current events according to what I saw around me.

"Change is possible. It may be fast and profound. Nature tells us so"

Every day, the sun rose a little earlier, and a little higher. A new flower opened. Gradually, winter's dun landscape was transformed, blade by blade, bud by bud. As chicks hatched from eggs, every crack in every drystone wall was noisy with their demands—a chattering from all directions. Dandelions shone like gold coins, closed, metamorphosed, then reopened as clocks, shedding seed into the wind like snow. The caterpillars sealed themselves away in chrysalises and cocoons, dissolved and reformed as butterflies and moths.

In a bowl in my kitchen, I kept a dozen tadpoles in water from a lily pond in the hill above my house. Over a period of weeks I saw

them swell, grow fat and heavy-lidded. I liked to watch them swim around. Then the transfiguration began.

At first their edges grew strange and indistinct, no longer totally solid. I could see through them, follow the outlines of their internal organs. One morning, as if by magic, two had sprung tiny legs—fully formed—that kicked behind them as they swam. At first these legs were pale and ghostly: slightly transparent, like glass noodles. They had skeletal toes, and moved with a weak, off-kilter motion that made me feel a little sick. Two days later, arms had appeared: thin and useless, ending in stumps. They grasped clumsily at strands of pondweed and rested just below the surface, or pulled themselves partially from the water onto a protruding rock.

They were weird to watch. Still, I couldn't look away. Over the next couple of days these limbs grew and solidified. Their tails shortened, and drew back into their bodies. Though still tiny—about the size of a fingernail—they were now, inarguably, more frog than tadpole.

When they began to climb the sides of the bowl, we knew it was time to release them. We tottered up the path to the pond with the new frogs in a mason jar, and poured the whole lot back in. As I did so, I felt a flash of something. Maybe hope. Change is possible. It may be fast and profound. Nature tells us so.

I feel it in the air now, sense it moving in the wind. Change is coming. But what kind of change are we facing?



Food court

Loving the local

Jonathan Nunn

I was born in London at the tail end of the 1980s and I've never seriously considered living anywhere else. While friends contemplate using the pandemic as an excuse to finally escape, something about the city's vast anonymity will always appeal to me. But during the lockdown, suddenly the *raison d'être* of living in a sprawling city got turned upside down.

For many of us, these past few months have seen our worlds shrink into mini-communities. I've been limited to a piece of south London I hadn't really got to know until lockdown. My walks have become reconnaissance missions: each day I learn a bit more about my neighbourhood. I make note of the variety of the architecture, see the hidden nooks and alleys between palatial townhouses, and examine the mulberry tree, which an artist has helpfully labelled. One day I even talked to my neighbours. An unintentional side effect of all this was that I fell in love with the Old Kent Road.

One of Britain's most ancient paths, the Old Kent Road is a superficially unlovely thoroughfare whose two miles form the start of the A2. Nowadays, people know it as the cheapest property on the Monopoly board but throughout its 2,000-year history, it provided a route for pilgrims to Canterbury, was a major site of Victorian industry, and today acts as an escape route to Dover and the Channel. Its lack of proximity to a train station has meant that, compared to its flashier neighbours, it can be forgotten about, like a jar of pickles at the back of the fridge. But what has fermented is an extraordinary ecosystem of communities, full of locals from Algeria, Vietnam, Africa and Latin America. With its halal butchers, African churches, Bolivian ice cream shops, and plethora of

languages, you can imagine a far-right activist taking in the bustle and claiming that London has gone to the dogs. But it is precisely this quality that makes it the single most important street in the city: a vision of an alternative London away from the regeneration and corporatism that dominates elsewhere.

When lockdown started, the road was suddenly drained of life—gone was the normal busyness, where outside dining culture often resembles a Parisian boulevard. Some have claimed that coronavirus's disproportionate impact on minority ethnic groups is due to a lack of social distancing in those communities, but I didn't see any evidence of this. When restaurants began to open on the Old Kent Road, their customers were often spotted wearing masks. Mutual aid networks—community groups that deliver food and supplies—sprung into action, advertisements for help in Spanish were pasted on the windows of Colombian bakeries, Algerian restaurants prepared free iftar meals in Ramadan that anyone could pick up, and churches in formerly industrial buildings became food collection centres. Restaurants and food shops have barely had to change their business models—the two butchers who sell competing rotisserie tandoori chicken have been doing roaring trades, along with naan shops and empanada stalls who have always sold affordable food to take away.

“This new village life suits me—the best things have been closer to home all along”

Why do our restaurants matter? Our emotional attachments to these businesses can seem strange—does anyone really mourn losing the chance to have a mediocre demi-poulet at Café Rouge? But at their best they anchor us to our communities, and are places of pleasure and communality. There is not much overlap in clientele between the restaurant where Nigerian patrons used to share beers over plates of offal and the Millwall pub opposite where the pints were combined instead with karaoke, but there is a common culture uniting these businesses: the need to develop an eccentricity and imagination to eke out a living from barren resources, not just in the face of a pandemic but also in peacetime.

Lockdown has shown the value of these small community economies and local food chains; that even in a huge city sometimes you don't need to go searching for anything. In truth, I'm dreading having to get on a train or bus again. This new village life suits me—the best things have been closer to home all along.

The Clapham Omnibus by Hannah Berry





Classical musing

Twists in the tragic tale

Charlotte Higgins

Sometimes I look at Boris Johnson and wonder, did we really have the same education? Did we really study the same classics course at the same Oxford college, learning from precisely the same teachers? It's true that I did not attend Eton—perhaps this is where my advantage lies—but, rather, an obscure and ordinary grammar-turned-independent in north Staffordshire. But still, why can't he see it? Why won't he see what's staring him in the face, straight out of Euripides and Sophocles?

As news of Dominic Cummings's trips to Durham and Barnard Castle set off a nationwide bout of bewilderment in May, playwright Zinnie Harris remarked on Twitter that she felt as if we were watching a Greek tragedy play out. She was absolutely right. Harris, who knows her way pretty well around Greek drama—her recent trilogy, *The Restless House*, is a reworking of Aeschylus's *Oresteia*—had spotted that Johnson was behaving uncannily like a stubborn, intransigent king in a Greek tragedy, crashing blindly up against justice, convinced that he is right and all others are wrong. Exhibit A of this literary type is Creon, King of Thebes, who forbids his niece Antigone from burying her brother Polynices. Exhibit B is Pentheus, another Theban king, who simply will not believe that the young man who has turned up in the city is an emissary (or more?) of the god Dionysus.

The plays in which these characters appear—Sophocles's *Antigone* and Euripides's *Bacchae*—are not simplistic right-against-wrong clashes; they are subtle and sophisticated literary masterpieces. However, things end very badly for both of these blinkered kings. After walling up Antigone in a cave as punishment for disobeying his edicts and burying Polynices, Creon eventually changes his mind and realises that he's gone too far; that he needs to retract. But he's too late. His niece is already dead, and so is his own son; then his wife kills herself in grief, too. Pentheus is gruesomely torn apart limb from limb by a band of ecstatic worshippers of Dionysus, including his own mother.

Johnson, of course, isn't the only world leader who has seemed, in recent weeks,



to be pushing against the claims of justice. Trump has been displaying impressive amounts of tragic hubris, both in his handling of the pandemic and of the Black Lives Matter protests. In 2016, *Antigone* was in fact staged in Ferguson, Missouri, a few blocks from the police station that became the focus of demonstrations after the shooting of Michael Brown. The production drew parallels between the ancient Theban world of the play and the modern-day struggles of African Americans.

When you're right in the middle of a drama, you can't see the shape of it. The story's architectonics become clear only when the actors have taken their final bows. Johnson will be familiar with the term *peripeteia*—a word employed by Aristotle to mean a drama's turning point, its great event of discovery. Maybe the *peripeteia* of Johnson's premiership will turn out to have been the moment when, amid the tragic loss of life brought about by the pandemic, he failed to sack his most important adviser for breaking his own government's lockdown rules, thus squandering the trust and goodwill of the populace. Or maybe not. There may be a few more twists in this Greek drama yet. Such stories don't always end unhappily—but most of them do.

The way we were

Extracts from memoirs and diaries
compiled by Ian Irvine

Meetings of great minds

1812 Beethoven and Goethe meet in the summer at the fashionable Bohemian spa of Teplice: The composer was then 41, the poet 62. Beethoven later reported: "How patient the great man was with me! How happy he made me then! I would have gone to death, yes, ten times to death for Goethe."

Goethe wrote to his wife: "I have never met an artist so self-contained, so energetic and so fervent." But shortly after he wrote to a friend noting: "His talent astounded me; nevertheless, he unfortunately has an utterly untamed personality, not completely wrong in thinking the world detestable, but hardly making it more pleasant for himself or others by his attitude. Yet he must be shown forgiveness and compassion, for he is losing his hearing, something that affects the musical part of his nature less than the social."

1911 Ludwig Wittgenstein, aged 22, arrives in Cambridge to study philosophy under Bertrand Russell, aged 39: Within weeks Russell had decided that Wittgenstein was a genius: "Some of his early views made the decision difficult. He maintained, for example, at one time that all existential propositions are meaningless. This was in a lecture room, and I invited him to consider the proposition: 'There is no hippopotamus in this room at present.' When he refused to believe this, I looked under all the desks without finding one; but he remained unconvinced."

Wittgenstein, for his part, later told his friend David Pines that Russell's encouragement had proved his salvation, and ended nine years of loneliness and suffering, during which he had continually thought of suicide.

1938 Salvador Dalí, aged 34, visits Sigmund Freud, 82, in Hampstead, London: Shortly after his flight from Nazi-occupied Vienna, Dalí sketches Freud's portrait. Dalí had been a fervent admirer since 1922 after reading *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Freud exclaimed: "That boy looks like a fanatic. Small wonder they have civil war in Spain if they look like that."

Dalí recalled the meeting as one of the most important experiences of his life. Whenever he could, he boasted that he had obliged the founder of psychoanalysis to reconsider his entire view of surrealism.



Popularity context

In search of showmen

Caroline O'Donoghue

Music festivals are off this year, of course. There is no way to have a festival that is socially distanced and still call it a festival. At festivals, you are not a person, but merely one body in a herd of cattle. It's glorious. Everyone's mindlessly grazing and defecating in the same field, watching with their big cow faces and their curious cow eyes. People claim they go to festivals for the music, and I don't believe them. We go for the *idea* of music; we go for the break from civilisation; we go to become wild again. We go for spectacle.

Which is strange, particularly when you think how little spectacle there is in modern pop acts. The UK in particular is crowded with male singer-songwriters who look like your little brother's friend that your mum is letting crash for a few weeks because he has "stuff" going on at home. Take our recent 20-something chart toppers. Lewis Capaldi has had a fight with his dad, your mother tells you fervently in the kitchen; Ed Sheeran isn't getting on with his mum's new boyfriend. And George Ezra! Well, love, George got caught with cigarettes in his schoolbag, and just needs to lie low for a minute. They are pop stars who do not look like pop stars, and aren't doing much to overcompensate for the fact either.

The world doesn't need another journalist picking on Ed Sheeran's music, particularly as there's nothing wrong with it. But there's nothing to look at. This is not a dig about how Ed Sheeran looks: there is literally *not much to look at*. A typical Sheeran shindig has no dancers, no outfit changes,

no cannons of confetti being shot into the crowd. There is just a man with his guitar and, gasp, a loop pedal. Is it the honest, stripped-back, three-chords-and-the-truth authenticity that so many people yearn for in an age of online fabrication? Yes. Is it spectacle? No.

Women-led pop, however, knows how to put on a show. American singer Lizzo dominated festival coverage in 2019, and rightly so: a lingerie-wearing black flautist with a team of dancers, alternately rapping, singing and delivering motivational speeches on self-love? We cows in the field mooed deliriously. We didn't know where to look. In her recent documentary, *Miss Americana*, Taylor Swift spoke on the need for female pop stars to be highly visual, and to change that visual often: "The female artists I know of have to remake themselves 20 times more than the male artists, or else you're out of a job." Meanwhile, the seven-piece Korean boy band BTS are starting a global revolution, attracting 50m online viewers for their high-energy gigs, proving that the male pop star who can put on a show is still very much in demand.

But watch festival coverage of most male UK pop music acts over the last 20-odd years and you'll notice a trend. Each generation of white male pop stars dials down the action. Their movements become boxier, more conservative. Blur, headlining Glastonbury in 1998, are the epitome of era-defining British pop and yet Damon Albarn knackers himself out. A full brass band behind him, Albarn throws himself around the stage with neither rhythm nor grace, nearly jump-kicking his own trumpet player. He looks like an idiot, but he looks like the exact kind of idiot the cows want: a confident idiot. By 2002, Coldplay's Chris Martin was headlining with a modest light show and doing the occasional well-timed jump like he's Super Mario.

"At festivals, you are not a person, but merely one body in a herd of cattle. It's glorious"

In 2010, a weird formality takes over, a stiffness that seems to take its inspiration from David Byrne: the men start wearing suits and jerking their arms in definitive downward strokes, their guitars held high on their chests. Era-defining acts Franz Ferdinand, Two Door Cinema Club and the Kaiser Chiefs all start dressing like they're in a barbershop quartet. By 2016, when Martin's back, his little jumps aren't even leaving the floor anymore.

Every few years, the boys seem a little more frightened of themselves. Flamboyance has been slowly put to sleep. But why? Social media, the scapegoat for so many things of the last decade, has its share of the blame: as more phones are trained on the stage, "wild abandon" feels like a risk you don't want to take. To try too hard as a man in British pop is to be a hair's distance from camp: you risk veering into being a Nana's favourite, à la Robbie Williams (who has never been afraid of aesthetics) or become perceived as a pseudo-comedy band, like The Darkness. Better to stand still, sing your soulful song, and be the guy that men will get a pint with and women will go on a date with. Low risk, high reward, bad show.

There are bright spots: Harry Styles and The 1975 are leading the way for a new era of gender exploration in male pop that isn't actually new, merely 1987 warmed up again. By the time we can have festivals again, I hope the lads have come up with a nice show for us. **■**



We're working together against domestic abuse until women and children are safe

Women's Aid is a grassroots federation working together to provide life-saving services in England and build a future where domestic abuse is not tolerated

Women's Aid is the national charity working to end domestic abuse against women and children. We're a federation of nearly 180 organisations providing local lifesaving services to women and children across the country. Every year our support services – including our Live Chat instant messenger service, demand for which has risen by 56% during lockdown - help thousands of women and children to cope, escape and recover from abuse.

Staying home has been essential during the pandemic. But for women and children experiencing domestic abuse, home is a not a place of safety. We have received harrowing reports from survivors isolated with a perpetrator during lockdown. Women are telling us that abuse is escalating and that perpetrators are manipulating lockdown measures to exert control.

Women's Aid and our national network of members are needed more than ever. But our life-saving services faced funding crisis before COVID 19; the pandemic could not have landed at a worse time. Our survey of local domestic abuse services in March demonstrated why COVID 19 is now the 'perfect storm' of challenges – from staff shortages and illness, to lost income and practical difficulties in supporting women and children remotely. A shocking 84% of domestic abuse providers have needed to reduce or cancel one or more of their critical services during the pandemic. Demand for refuges was sky-high before COVID 19 and now, at a time when they are needed more than ever, the number of refuge vacancies has halved.

Women and children living in fear across the country need action. Women's Aid is calling for commitment at the highest levels of government to prevent harm and protect and support survivors. £27 million in emergency funding over the next five months has been welcome. But for frontline women's charities it has been a messy, stressful and bureaucratic process at a time of crisis. A guarantee of a secure funding future for our sector is now essential;

before COVID 19 Women's Aid estimated that at least £393 million per year for women's specialist domestic abuse services is needed to ensure no survivor is turned away.

The return of the Domestic Abuse Bill is a landmark moment. COVID 19 has demonstrated why we need a transformation in the future response to domestic abuse. The Bill must go beyond criminal justice and deliver the changes survivors' need – from safe housing to welfare reform, the family courts and support for children. Most urgently, the law must deliver equal access to protection and support for migrant women, who face the greatest barriers to safety. During this time of national crisis no survivor should be turned away. We look forward to working with all MPs to ensure this legislation truly delivers a future free from fear, and free from abuse.



Nicki Norman
Acting Chief Executive, Women's Aid
Federation of England

women's aid
until women & children are safe

[womensaid.org.uk](https://www.womensaid.org.uk)

Prospect **Policy report: NHS infrastructure**

What recovery for a traumatised health service?



Tom Clark *Editor, Prospect*
Hospitals vs the home front

Is there any field where the political debate is further from the concerns of policy wonks than the NHS? For a generation, managers, think tanks and academics have argued that the sustainable route to affordable health care in a fast-ageing society involves more care being provided closer to home, and patients being empowered to manage the chronic and multiplying conditions of old age while still getting on with their lives. In last year's election, however, Boris Johnson's flagship promise was to build 40 new hospitals, and the political argument was about how many of those were actually going to get built—not whether hospital building was the right priority.

With the coming of coronavirus, nations have certainly been reminded to be grateful for hospitals. But the terrifying early shortage of ventilators, and the remarkable agility (which minister Edward Argar highlights below) then shown in creating the “Nightingales” are reminders that it's unwise to be too constrained by fixed plans or existing infrastructure. Argar is right to say that the hospital sector pulled the UK back from the

brink that was fallen over in parts of Europe: very few hospital patients appear, in the end, to have been denied life-saving intensive care. But Labour's Jonathan Ashworth fairly points out that overall Covid-19 death rates rank among the worst in the world, and that the focus on the virus will cast a long shadow of morbidity because of other conditions going untreated.

Perhaps the biggest reason for this apparent mismatch—our hospitals broadly pulling through the crisis, even when so many of our citizens did not—is the neglected backwater of the care home sector, where the tally of deaths is astonishingly high. Again, experts have long called this the system's weakest link, but politicians have never got beyond vague talk of reform. Gleaming buildings grab attention. But even shiny new hospitals won't work well until there is somewhere safe and genuinely caring to discharge frail patients to, and without breaking them financially. For me, the “infrastructure” we need to fix first is less to do with bricks and mortar, than the faulty wiring between hospitals and these homes.



Edward Argar *Minister for Health*
A plan for the post-Covid era

With the country turning the tide on coronavirus, it is right that we look forward, while staying alert to prevent a second wave. This invisible killer has disrupted every aspect of our lives, but it has also reminded us of the special place of the NHS. We emerge more committed than ever to securing its future and the health of the nation.

Throughout the pandemic the government, with the support of the public, has worked tirelessly to protect the health service, to ensure it had the resources it needed so that demand never outstripped capacity, and as a result, lives were saved.

But while the focus recently has been on the pandemic, work on delivering our long-term Health Infrastructure Plan and our commitment of 40 new hospitals has continued at pace.

In the past, the approach to NHS infrastructure by governments of all complexions has been uncoordinated, but now more than ever it is essential that we properly invest in and plan for the future of the NHS. After all, our frontline health and care workers, to whom as a nation we owe our gratitude, have brought us through this crisis and they deserve state-of-the-art facilities in which to carry out their lifesaving work. This in turn will help provide better care and a better experience for patients.

The Health Infrastructure Plan (HIP), launched last year, set our priorities over the long term, and is designed to give our world-class health professionals the tools they need to do their jobs. At its core is the largest hospital-building programme in a generation, launched with a £2.7bn investment that gives six new hospitals the funding to go ahead now, with the pledge to deliver 40 in total over the next 10 years. Last year we also announced £1.8bn to upgrade outdated facilities and tackle urgent projects, including major upgrades at 20 hospitals, and this was an important precursor to the HIP programme.

Considerable progress has been made already. Work is due to start soon on the first of these major upgrades, some of the

first six new hospitals are approaching early enabling works and the rest have received seed funding and are rapidly working up their business cases. We are focused on improving how we support projects centrally to speed up approvals, bringing additional expertise to bear and making greater use of modern construction methods. Of course Covid-19 presents a risk, but to date no schemes have reported delays to their projected timelines.

NHS infrastructure is more than just new buildings, and we are investing in the kind of personalised, preventative healthcare that will deliver a world-beating healthcare system for years to come. This means ensuring staff can harness new technologies in genomics and artificial intelligence to deliver better care and empower people to manage their own health. As part of this, we have already committed £200m that will benefit over 80 trusts with new state-of-the-art diagnostic machines to drive earlier cancer diagnosis, and £250m for a new National Artificial Intelligence Lab to use AI to improve the health of patients. These commitments are part of a programme of rolling investment to support the core of our NHS—our amazing workforce.

At the start of this pandemic the NHS worked with the army and others to create our Nightingale hospitals in a matter of weeks. As a result, the capacity to provide care has always stayed ahead of patient need. While they were born out of necessity and are no substitute for the long-term infrastructure investment plan, the Nightingales demonstrate what our NHS is capable of delivering in order to protect life.

As a country, we have faced a huge challenge that has not yet fully gone away. We have met it as individuals and as communities, with resolve and by making very real sacrifices. And we have met it through the tremendous efforts of our NHS and care sector. As we look towards the future, we must ensure the NHS has the tools it needs to continue to provide world-leading healthcare. We are doing just that.





Jonathan Ashworth Shadow Health Secretary

Austerity had battered the NHS even before Covid-19. Now we must rebuild

The NHS avoided the kind of devastating scenes that took place in struggling Lombardy hospitals, witnessed by us on our TV screens. For that we can thank NHS staff, whose extraordinary efforts were until recently rightly celebrated on doorsteps across Britain on Thursday nights. They must now be recognised with decent pay, conditions and support.

But “protecting the NHS” has come at an immense human cost: thousands of patients discharged into care homes to free up general and acute beds, the mass cancellation of elective surgery, and the delay of vital treatments, not to mention the unquantifiable mental health problems festering as a result of the anxiety and loneliness associated with lockdown.

The waiting list for treatment—already unacceptably high—is predicted to rise to a staggering 10m by Christmas. Emergency department data shows numbers presenting at A&E with symptoms of a possible heart attack halved throughout early lockdown; one in four people with lung conditions such as COPD have had either a GP or hospital appointment cancelled.

Cancer specialists warn that two million people are waiting for cancer screening, tests or treatment, while cancer referrals are down 60 per cent and around 1,600 cases are currently left undiagnosed every month.

This growing mountain of unmet clinical need is a national emergency and will lead to worsening health conditions for people and premature deaths unless tackled. For that we must equip the National Health Service with the necessary resources. It cannot simply remain a National Covid Service.

With infection and hospitalisation rates for coronavirus currently falling, we now need to put in place the infrastructure to provide care and treatment for both Covid-19 and non-Covid-19 patients alike. That means a mass regime across the health service to test all NHS staff weekly, and to test patients admitted for non-Covid-19 treatment. Given we know that around 20 per cent of Covid-19 infections come from within hospital, this is urgent. A recent study from Imperial College London claimed that weekly testing of healthcare workers

is “estimated to reduce their contribution to transmission by 25-33 per cent, on top of reductions achieved by self-isolation following symptoms.”

Capacity constraints have meant hospitals throughout the crisis have run at lower levels of occupancy than normal. This isn’t sustainable, and will mean some hospital trusts may now need to physically reconfigure sites to allow for Covid-19 and non-Covid-19 hospital buildings.

But the NHS confronts this challenge from the worst possible starting point. Years of austerity have seen billions cut from hospital maintenance budgets, leaving trusts with a £6.6bn repair bill. It has meant hospitals left scrambling to cope with ward ceilings falling in or sewage pipes bursting and with faulty, out-of-date equipment.

“Around 1,600 cancer cases are currently left undiagnosed every month”

We have had years of stringent finances and chronic staff shortages, with around 15,000 beds lost since 2010. Lack of investment has left us with among the lowest numbers of MRI and CT scanners per head in the OECD.

Demands to balance budgets have forced local NHS bosses into selling off land and buildings that could now be used. Last year, over 800 hectares of NHS land were put on the market. A new approach is needed that delivers the large-scale diagnostics testing, beds and investment for building works necessary.

Time is pressing. A second wave of the virus, coinciding with winter flu, could be devastating without action. We know the UK already shamefully stands out, having one of the worst tolls in the world, with 65,000 excess deaths, over 50,000 of those deaths associated with coronavirus and 13,000 of them in care homes. Ministers have been slow and disorganised in their response to the pandemic. They must learn from their mistakes and show urgency now. **12**

Waiting lists for non-coronavirus related treatment are predicted to rise to a staggering 10m by Christmas



independent thinking from polity

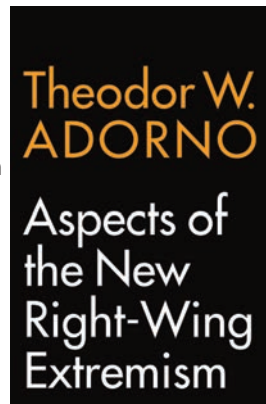
Aspects of the New Right-Wing Extremism

Theodor W. Adorno

On 6 April 1967, at the invitation of the Socialist Students of Austria at the University of Vienna, Theodor W. Adorno gave a lecture which is not merely of historical interest. Against the background of the rise of the National Democratic Party of Germany, Adorno analysed the goals, resources and tactics of the new right-wing nationalism of this time.

Much has changed since then, but some elements have remained the same or resurfaced in new forms, 50 years later. Adorno's penetrating analysis of the sources of right-wing radicalism is as relevant today as it was five decades ago.

PB 9781509541454 | April 2020 | £9.99



The Case for a Job Guarantee

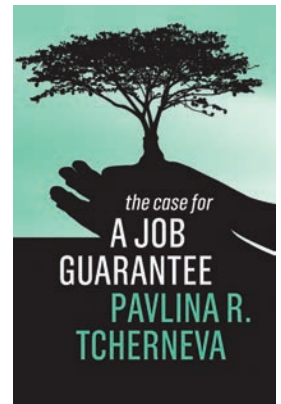
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A History of Solitude

David Vincent

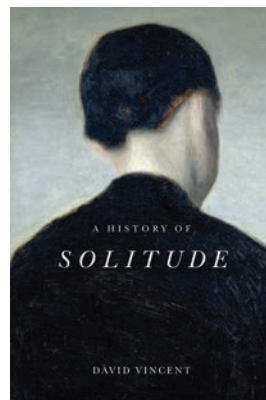
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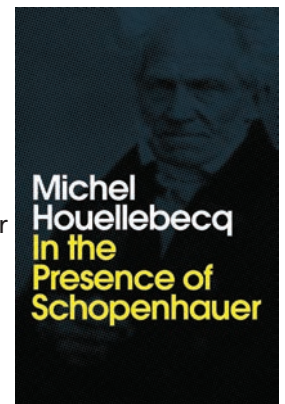
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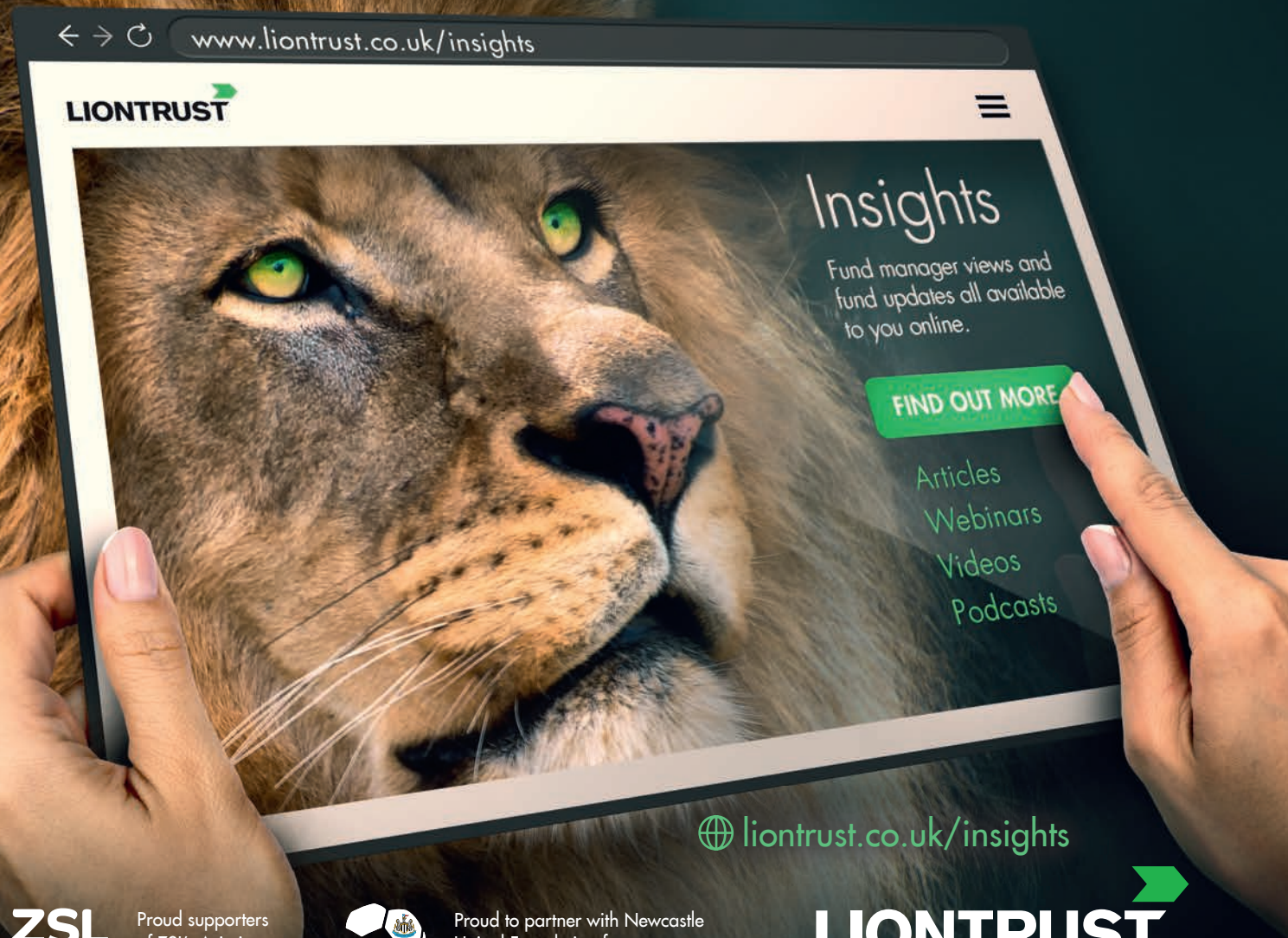
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Prospect Economics and investment



The analyst: Paul Wallace

Is inflation going to stage a comeback?

Before the coronavirus crisis, an upsurge in inflation appeared an increasingly remote threat. Now it looks even less menacing as output has collapsed in the wake of the pandemic. But the immediate impact of an economic shock does not necessarily tell the full story. Further ahead, inflation could arise from its deathbed and punish investors who have come to take its quiescence for granted.

As economies continue to struggle in the wake of the shutdown, the short-term outlook is for even lower inflation. In June, the OECD forecast that by the final quarter of 2020 the annual rate will be just 0.2 per cent in Britain and zero in the eurozone. If there is a second wave of the pandemic later this year, inflation could become deflation.

But looking beyond the next year or so, there is a distinct risk that inflation could stage a comeback. One of the main forces bearing down on prices since the mid-1990s has been globalisation. As more and more products have poured in from low-wage Asian economies, above all China, it has been cheaper to buy goods and harder for western workers to push up pay. But that disinflationary tide of globalisation has been ebbing. The pandemic will intensify that trend as both businesses and governments heed security considerations and restructure supply chains.

Businesses are also likely to regain some of the pricing power they have lacked in the era of “lowflation.” The severity of the downturn will sweep away many of the zombie companies that low interest rates have (just about) kept alive since the financial crisis. That should make it easier for the firms that do survive to push up prices.

What’s more, expectations of price stability among consumers have been jolted. While the headline overall inflation rate

sank to 0.5 per cent in May, research in June from the Institute for Fiscal Studies looked at everyday purchases of food, drink and household goods and found “an unprecedented spike in inflation at the beginning of lockdown.” The authors warned of “a possible return to stagflation”—the baleful mix of inflation and sluggish growth that characterised the 1970s.

Last but not least, there is little appetite to tackle big budget deficits and soaring public debt through renewed austerity. That will increase the temptation for governments to inflate it away. Increasingly compliant central banks could connive in this by arguing that an overshoot of their inflation targets would make up for the previous undershoot.

If inflation does flare up again it will spell trouble for conventional government bonds, which provide no compensation for rising prices. Once investors and traders expect higher inflation they will value such bonds less. By contrast, index-linked bonds, which do provide protection against inflation, will have their day in the sun.

In principle, equities should be less vulnerable than conventional bonds because they are claims on the real economy, specifically corporate profits, which should rise with inflation. But even they are unlikely to do as well as before, because investors become more cautious about the value they put on future earnings when inflation is on the march. Both bonds and equities suffered when the post-war inflationary tide swept all before it during the 1970s. They have done much better in the subsequent era of falling inflation.

A resurgence in inflation may seem unlikely now, but so, too, did the retreat that started in the 1980s. If inflation does return, markets will become less friendly places for investors, who will have to follow new rules to keep afloat.



The punter: Andy Davis

The best pensions advice? Check who’s advising you

When does it make sense to give up a guaranteed, inflation-proof income for life and swap it for a lump sum today? On the face of it, recent history suggests the answer for a lot of people is quite often. Over the past four years, around 400,000 people have taken advantage of the “pension freedoms” that came into force in 2015 to cash in “final salary” schemes provided by present or former employers. Tens of billions of pounds have been transferred to so-called “defined contribution” pensions, from which it can be withdrawn as cash.

In some cases, this can make sense. The owner might have a life-shortening illness: a transfer gives them access to the full value of their pension savings immediately. Or the pension might be small—the result of a short period of employment—so cashing in will not have a big impact.

But these are exceptions. The Financial Conduct Authority recently noted: “For most people a transfer out of a [final salary] scheme is unlikely to be suitable.” That, however, has not prevented financial advisers recommending it in a remarkably high proportion of cases. The FCA now says that about 40 per cent of those advised to transfer out received advice that was not suitable for their personal circumstances, although that proportion has latterly reduced. In the notorious case of the British Steel Pension Scheme, only about 20 per cent of the 7,700

former steel workers who transferred out were found to have received suitable advice.

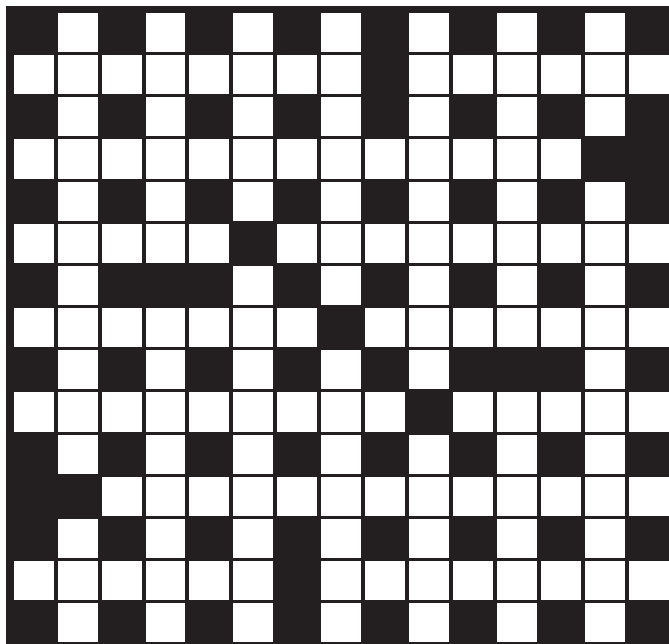
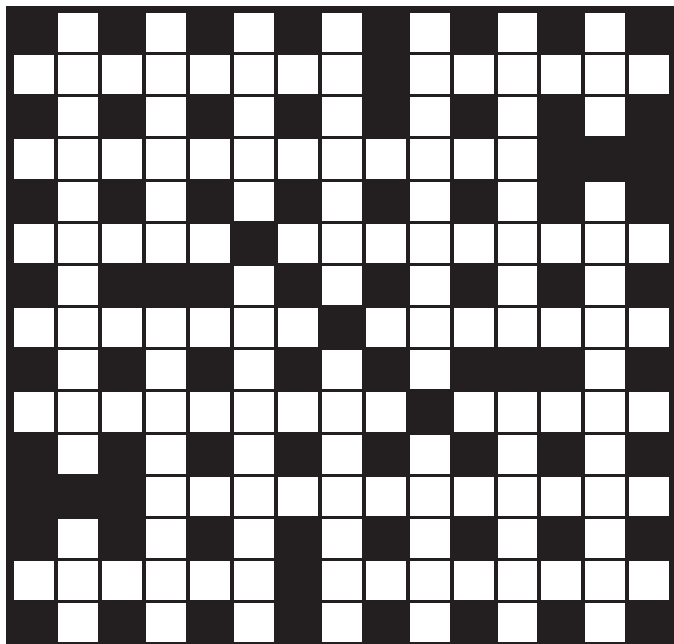
This was an accident waiting to happen. Behavioural economists have understood for many years that if you offer a choice between a lot of money today and regular, smaller sums in future, you shouldn’t be surprised when most people pick the lump sum. And if you allow advisers to offer contingent charging, whereby the client pays for the advice only if they decide to go ahead, it is even less surprising that advisers tend to recommend a transfer. The charging structure helps to reinforce the client’s natural bias. Perfect.

Contingent charging will be banned from October (why not immediately?) and almost a quarter of firms advising on pension transfers have left the market after conversations with the FCA.

But are we destined always to shut these doors after the horse has bolted? If financial professionals had a legal duty of care to their clients, things might have been different. This is exactly the proposal in a private member’s Bill that had its first reading in the Lords in January. Since then it has been stuck in limbo, waiting for parliamentary business to resume in full.

When it does, I hope the government backs it. It is simply bizarre that people charging for financial advice are under no legal obligation to protect their clients’ best interests. **P**

The generalist by Didymus



Each completed grid will contain solutions beginning with all 26 letters of the alphabet. Solvers should assign each solution to its correct position in the appropriate grid. The clues are presented in exact alphabetical order of their solutions.

- A The largest city in New Mexico, named after the duke who was Viceroy of New Spain (11)
Malt vinegar (6)
- B Encore! (3)
In wine-making, the fungus which causes noble rot (8)
- C English actor, Tom ..., who starred in *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* and *Billy Liar* (9)
In an utterly stupid manner (7)
- D Tomorrow in Toulon (6)
Scribble or draw aimlessly (6)
- E Greek goddess of the dawn (3)
Six vowels denoting the sequence of tones in passages of the lesser doxology (6)
- F Formal legal decree issued by a Muslim judicial authority (5)
100 fillér (6)
- G Foreign worker in Germany (12)
Opera hat (5)
- H Daily published verbatim report of proceedings in Parliament (7)
On older graveyard monuments, "Here lies" (3,5)
- I South African Zulu political movement seeking liberation from white minority rule (7)
Historic city on the Bosphorus, partly in Europe, partly in Asia (8)
- J Flowering quince (8)
Forename of Claire Rayner's son, the food critic (3)
- K Patron saint of Glasgow (9)
Legendary heroine of the *Nibelungenlied* (9)
- L Irish author of tales of mystery and the supernatural, including *In a Glass Darkly* (2,4)
City in Saxony where JS Bach is buried in St Thomas' Church (7)

- M A feudal superior's right to arrange the wedding of a vassal's offspring (8)
County in Leinster province, the location of Trim and Kells (5)
- N Put at a loss, confound (7)
The first decade of this century (9)
- O May 29th, the anniversary of the Restoration in 1660 (3,5,3)
The wood sorrel family (6)
- P Mild form of epilepsy (5,3)
Tshwane, the administrative capital of South Africa (8)
- Q Holiday resort near Bugibba on Malta (5)
Nickname of Charlotte, Cincinnati or Regina (5,4)
- R Wall decoration behind an altar (7)
US actor who starred with Paul Newman in *The Sting* (6,7)
- S An aerosol or, in Australia, harsh criticism (5)
Wedge of bread cut from a flat round loaf, split and filled with meat and cheese (7)
- T Pop group whose original members were Gary Barlow, Howard Donald, Jason Orange, Mark Owen and Robbie Williams (4,4)
Topsy-turvy in Tobermory (12)
- U The genus of the elm (5)
City in central New York state, where the first Woolworths store was opened in 1879 (5)
- V Comings and goings across the Channel (2-2-5)
The network of small blood vessels which supply the walls of large ones (4,7)
- W Thoroughfare in Soho, laid out in the 1680s, and since WW1 synonymous with the British film industry (7,6)
A temporary semicircular Aboriginal shelter (6)
- X Achilles' wonderful horse and brother of Balios (7)
President of the People's Republic of China since 2013 (2,7)
- Y Residence of an official mandarin in imperial China (5)
Huang He, called "China's sorrow" owing to its tendency to flood with devastating consequences (6,5)
- Z A form of Oriental cymbal (3)
Small skullcap worn by RC clergy; white for the Pope, red for a cardinal and purple for a bishop (9)

Last month's solutions

Across: 1 *Ancrene Wisse*, 7 Barretts, 13 *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, 14 Resnais, 15 Hole in the wall, 16 Acrospire, 17 Meadowsweet, 18 Ensemble, 20 Graces, 21 Hogan, 23 Alan Connor, 25 Heidelberg, 29 Valse, 30 Hodman, 31 Overfell, 34 Derailments, 35 *Ruiddigore*, 37 Iveagh Gardens, 38 Upswing, 39 *Floris and Blancheflour*, 40 Airheads, 41 Credit crisis

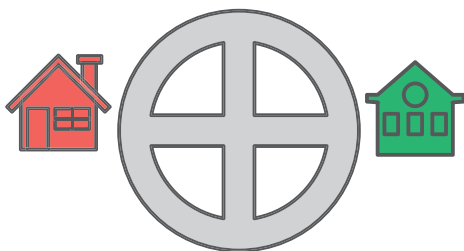
Down: 1 *Atharva Veda*, 2 Camisards, 3 Enseams, 4 Enniskillen, 5 Irish Sea, 6 Sanglamore, 8 Auditions, 9 Rhodes scholar, 10 Theban eagle, 11 Singleton, 12 David Archer, 19 *Michelin Guide*, 22 London pride, 24 Aller-retour, 26 David Suchet, 27 *Golden Girls*, 28 Ratskeller, 29 Vide infra, 30 Home Guard, 32 Emoticons, 33 Prisoned, 36 Insofar

Enigmas & puzzles

Tournament of the mind

Barry R Clarke

Time to coax those neurons out of lockdown and enter the *Prospect* summer puzzle challenge! Below is a set of six enigmas in logic and mathematics, designed to exercise your problem-solving skills. When you think you have six answers, submit your entry as described below for a chance to win a prize.



1. Distance learning

Every afternoon, Jogger Jane runs from her home (in red) to the school (in green) to collect her child. Each of the four straight roads is 1km long and each of the four curved ones is 1.5km. She always runs more than 3km, and in doing so, she never passes along the same road twice. Not all roads are necessarily used in a single run, she can pass by her home, and once she reaches the school her run ends.

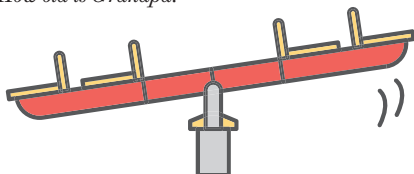
How many different routes can she choose from?

2. The digital age

A veteran of several Twitter wars, Grandpa was now being interviewed by *Demob Matters* Magazine to canvas his views on various social media issues. However, he was never one to fire directly at the target. When asked his age he gave the following enigmatic response.

- (1) It consists of two different digits 1–9.
- (2) The difference between the digits is not a prime number.
- (3) My age is divisible by 3.
- (4) The sum of the digits is greater than 6.
- (5) At least one digit is a triangular number.
- (6) Reversing the digits of my age gives a number less than my age.

How old is Grandpa?



3. Moggy maths

Each of the nine members of the Feline Fat cat family has a different digit value for its weight 1–9. Three of them decide to sit on the seesaw (above), one to a seat, so that it balances. The

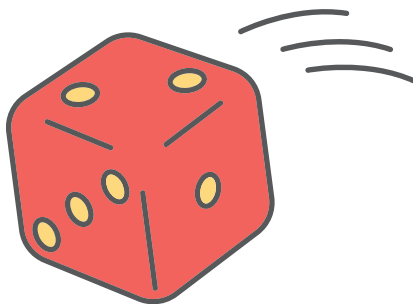
seats are set at one and two units distance from the middle. Their total weight is 15 and there is at least one prime number weight.

What is the sum of the weights of the two cats who sit on the same side?

4. Al jabber

Young Al had just finished reading his book *Difficult Sums* as his grandfather Grumble entered the room holding a watering can. Said Al excitedly: “Seven years ago, I was a third of the age you were, when you were twice the age I will be in seven years’ time.” Grumble was used to his grandson’s irrelevant utterances so he ignored him. He was far more interested in watering his pot plant. Neither has reached the age of 100 and the sum of their ages is a square number.

What is Grumble’s present age?



5. Neuron’s number

During lockdown, Professor Neuron found a wonderful way to waste his time. He threw a regular six-sided dice three times until he had three different digits 1–6. Then he wrote them down as a three-digit number. On one occasion, neither of the two end digits was prime, the number was divisible by 3, and the third digit was more than 1 less than the second one.

What was the three-digit number?

6. Horse play

General Dobbin, the military leader of the equine fraternity, was adamant that the average number of horseflies encamped on any horse at any moment was at least a two-digit number. Squadron Leader Clump, the leader of the horsefly world, disagreed and stated that it was only a single digit 1–9. So Clump called a news

conference in the Pose Garden at the Flight House and made six statements about the digit.

- (1) Less than 5.
- (2) Prime number.
- (3) Divisible by 3.
- (4) Odd number.
- (5) Does not immediately follow a prime.
- (6) Square number.

Unfortunately, Clump was incapable of consistently telling the truth and so not all the statements are true. The correct digit is exactly divisible by the number of false statements.

What is the digit?

How to enter

The generalist prize

The winner receives *Chaucer: A European Life* by Marion Turner. In this new biography, we follow Chaucer’s travels across Europe, from the commercial wharves of London to the chapels of Florence, and discover what inspired the son of a wine merchant to write some of the landmark works in the canon.



Enigmas & puzzles prize

The winner receives *The Five: The Untold Lives of the Women Killed by Jack the Ripper* by Hallie Rubenhold. Recipient of last year’s Baillie Gifford Prize, this book gives a voice to the women overshadowed by historical events, revealing there is much more to their individual stories than the murderer they share in common.



Rules

Send your solution to answer@prospect-magazine.co.uk or Crossword/Enigmas, *Prospect*, 2 Queen Anne’s Gate, SW1H 9AA. Include your email and postal address. Entries must be received by 31st August. Winners announced in our October issue.

Last month’s winners

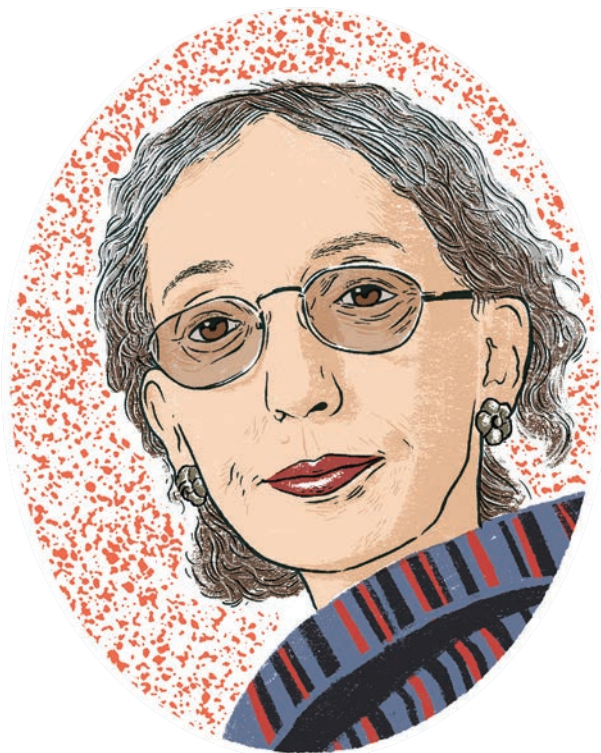
The generalist: Kathleen Fry
Enigmas & puzzles: Ed Moores

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prospectmagazine.co.uk

Last month’s solution

The area is 36. The fence equation is $x + y + z = 2y + 2 + z$ from which $x = y + 2$. The area equation is $z = (x + 23)/(y + 1)$ which after substituting x becomes $z = (y + 25)/(y + 1)$. Running up through the y starting at $y = 2$ and looking for a whole number z , the only possibilities are $(x, y, z) = (4, 2, 9), (5, 3, 7), (7, 5, 5), (9, 7, 4), (13, 11, 3)$ or $(25, 23, 2)$. Their totals are 15, 15, 17, 20, 27, and 50, respectively. The triplet $(13, 11, 3)$ has a total of 27, and so both of the digital sums are 9. This gives $x = 13$ and the area is $13 + 23 = 36$.

Brief encounter



Joyce Carol Oates

Author

ILLUSTRATION BY NICK TAYLOR

What is your most embarrassing moment at a book signing?

At Black Oak Books in Berkeley, some years ago, an enormous crowd (or so it seemed to me) came to my reading on a rainy day; there were many rows of seats, and some people were standing; but when the reading ended, and patrons lined up to have books signed, a good portion of the audience melted away... I was informed that the large audience was comprised partly of homeless persons who'd come into the bookstore to get out of the rain.

What is your favourite quotation?

"...the rest is the madness of art." (Henry James)

If you were given £1m to spend on other people, what would you spend it on and why?

Why would you assume that I have not already done that? The charities I contribute to include animal rescue shelters and

Centurion Ministries, an organisation that works to free wrongly convicted individuals. The majority of them are black men shockingly prosecuted on scant or no evidence, found "guilty," and left to moulder in prisons through the US, often on death row... but don't get me started on racist injustice in the US.

Who is your role model?

My parents Carolina and Fred Oates. They were models of love, thoughtfulness, compassion—patience and wisdom. Not well educated—both had to drop out of school in eighth grade, to work—but they were supportive of my wish to go to college; and, in time, avid book readers. They were beloved by younger friends and neighbours whom I did not know in their later years. Having lived through the Depression, and survived, my parents never complained!

What have you changed your mind about?

I am much more forgiving than I was in my earlier years. After I lost my husband Raymond Smith, in February 2008, I realised why so many people "self-medicate"—why so many are said to "abuse" alcohol and drugs. Simply to keep going when one is severely depressed—simply to exist—is a challenge. I would now never dream of criticising people for doing all that they can, even if it is short-sighted and will prove a mistake, just to keep going for one more day, not to mention one more night.

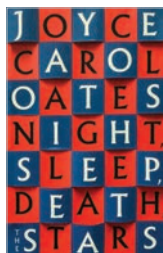
Can you teach someone to be a writer?

Anyone who can write a letter can (probably) be a "writer" of some sort. We all use the English language, and we are all storytellers at heart. Of course, no one can "teach" anyone to be a great writer—no more than anyone could teach a composer to compose like Mozart. But to be a commercially successful writer of, for instance, Young Adult fiction, would probably be within the realm of possibility.

What's the perfect book to read in a crisis?

It seems that every day in the US is a "crisis" of sorts so obviously numerous "crisis" books are required. In fact, I have been reading *War and Peace* with an online book club, which is ideal since it is essentially five novels in one, linked by several sympathetic characters and families, thematically unified by Tolstoy's fascination with Napoleon. That fascination would seem to mirror Dostoyevsky's kindred fascination with Napoleon, the generating spirit of *Crime and Punishment*.

Good "crisis" reading is provided by thought-provoking novels that attempt to explain, through representative characters (Tolstoy's Pierre, Dostoyevsky's Raskolnikov), something of the folly and vanity of human behaviour in situations of moral uncertainty. **12**



Joyce Carol Oates's new novel is *"Night. Sleep. Death. The Stars"* (Fourth Estate)

UK Ports: A shared agenda



01 Deliver free ports to drive exports and create jobs

Drive the creation of free ports to attract new investment and create new jobs where they are most needed. Many ports such as Port Talbot and Hull offer ideal locations for new manufacturing and can help increase Britain's exports.

02 Support resilient and sustainable supply chains

Humber ports can help businesses avoid Brexit disruption at Dover. By increasing the amount of EU trade using Humber ports we can reduce the number of HGVs on Britain's roads, improving safety and reducing CO2 to help tackle climate change.

03 Make sure more businesses are ready for Brexit

An insufficient number of businesses trading with the EU are equipped to deal with customs procedures. A major campaign is needed to promote awareness about what businesses need to do and provide simplified guidance.

04 Give businesses the best access to global markets

Help businesses to trade and increase exports by prioritising investment in transport links to ports and make sure ports can grow. The Port of Southampton is the UK's number one export port so making sure it can continue to offer the best access to global markets is vital for our economy.

05 Build a stronger vision for trade

The UK needs a bolder vision for trade and exports to rally behind. A comprehensive review of Government policy is needed to make sure the nation is equipped to deliver ambitious goals by promoting skills, sustainability and innovation.

Because keeping the lights on shouldn't cost the earth

At Octopus, we asked why companies weren't making energy greener, smarter and more affordable for everyone. So we built an energy business to do just that.

Today, we're not only one of the largest renewable energy investors in Europe, we're also one of the UK's top-rated energy suppliers, supplying hundreds of thousands of customers with renewable energy that doesn't cost a small fortune.

We call it 'a brighter way', changing today for a better tomorrow. To find out more, visit octopusgroup.com.



octopus

A brighter way